















POSTHUMOUS WORKS

OF THE

REV. RALPH WARDLAW, D.D.

EDITED BY HIS SON.

THE REV. J. S. WARDLAW, A.M.

VOL. III.

A. FULLARTON & CO.:  
44 SOUTH BRIDGE, EDINBURGH;  
AND 115 NEWGATE STREET, LONDON.

---

MDCCCLXI.



L E C T U R E S

ON

THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

BY THE

REV. RALPH WARDLAW, D.D.

EDITED BY HIS SON,

THE REV. J. S. WARDLAW, A.M.

SECOND EDITION.

VOL. III.

A. FULLARTON & CO.:  
EDINBURGH, LONDON, AND DUBLIN.

---

1869.

EDINBURGH :  
FULLARTON AND MACNAB, PRINTERS, LEITH WALK.

## LECTURE LXVI.

—◆—  
PROV. XXI. 14—20.

“A gift in secret pacifieth anger; and a reward in the bosom strong wrath. It is joy to the just to do judgment: but destruction shall be to the workers of iniquity. The man that wandereth out of the way of understanding shall remain in the congregation of the dead. He that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man; he that loveth wine and oil shall not be rich. The wicked shall be a ransom for the righteous, and the transgressor for the upright. It is better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and an angry woman. There is treasure to be desired, and oil in the dwelling of the wise; but a foolish man spendeth it up.”

IN the first of these verses, we have a subject which, under various aspects, has been repeatedly before us.\*—The offer on one side, and the reception on the other, of any “*gift*” that wears the form of a *bribe*, be it for the perversion of judgment—the tempting of a judge or an arbitrator to give a decision contrary to conscientious conviction,—or for the securing of an office, whether the office be of the lowest or of the highest description,—a place at a municipal Board, or a seat in the British Parliament,—deserves unqualified reprobation. It is well when corruption of this kind is sifted, detected, exposed, and publicly disgraced and put down. There are cases, however, in which “*gifts*” may be bestowed in perfect good faith, and for the most desirable ends,—when they may be lawful, proper, and even necessary.

The case supposed in this verse, seems to be that in which we have been guilty of something provoking, by which the

\* Chap. xvii. 8; xviii. 16; xix. 6.

anger of our neighbour has been stirred;—in which the offence taken has been well-founded; although the anger may not, in its degree at least, be justifiable. In such a case, submission, confession, apology, are manifestly due from us: and “*a gift*” may be an accompanying token of our sincerity in making it, and of our respect for the party offended.

When, however, such a “gift” is bestowed, it must, in order to its answering its end, be bestowed *discreetly*—not in any such way as is calculated to produce the impression of selfishness, or vanity, or a mercenary spirit, on the part of him who receives it. It must, therefore, be “a gift *in secret*,” not ostentatious; not such as to bring credit to ourselves, and attach meanness to the other party,—credit to us for generosity,—meanness to him for selfish cupidity. There may be cases, indeed, in which the offence has been public, and in which the gift may be a public acknowledgment and public reparation. In such cases, publicity may be called for. But there must nothing be done that either implies on our part, or seems to impute on the other, aught that is hypocritical or dishonourable. All must be open and ingenuous,—all in “simplicity and godly sincerity.”

“Have gifts,” says a judicious writer, “such a powerful influence to disarm resentment? Then let no man plead, in apology for the fury of his passions, that he is not able to conquer them. If *money* can conquer them, shall reason, and the fear of God, and the command of Christ, be too weak to bridle them? Surely the commandments of God our Saviour have too little authority with us, if they have less influence upon our spirits than gold and jewels have upon the spirits of almost all men.”

Verse 15. “It is joy to the just to do judgment: but destruction shall be to the workers of iniquity.” You will perceive, that, without the supplement, the antithesis in this verse is by no means direct and pointed. Other renderings accordingly have been given. As the following:—

1. “The doing of what is right is joy to the just; but destruction (is joy) to the workers of iniquity:”—the right-



eous, that is, delight in doing good, but the wicked in working mischief and ruin. The one resembles God, "who loveth righteousness and judgment, and of whose goodness the earth is full;" and Christ, who "with righteousness judges the poor, and reproveth with equity for the meek of the earth;" who "went about doing good." The other resembles Satan, who "was a murderer from the beginning;" whose work of delight is to tempt and to destroy; "who hath his name *Apollyon*."

2. "It is joy to the just to do right; but vexation" (distress, trouble) "to the workers of iniquity." Such is Boothroyd's rendering; and it agrees with the French. The righteous find their happiness in the ways of God,—in doing the thing that is right. So far from true religion—practical godliness—being a source to them of irksome melancholy, it is their "*joy*." But to the wicked it *is* irksome. The principle of goodness or of godliness being absent from the heart, all conformity to precept is against the grain with them. They may do what is right from compulsion, from considerations of interest, or from the constraint of conscience and fear; but pleasure in it they have none—no "*joy*." And hence it is that amongst ungodly, worldly men, the impression and saying are so prevalent, that *religion is melancholy*. While the heart continues at enmity with God, all outward conformity to the will and worship of God can be nothing better than vexation,—harassing and fretting to the spirit, and drawing forth the exclamation, What a weariness is it! The joy of religious and virtuous practice can only be felt, where there is the inward power of religious and virtuous principle. It is a joy that can only be known by the experience of the new heart; and *by* the new heart it is felt to be the only joy worthy of the name. But the heart that is still a stranger to the love must be still a stranger to the joy; and the whole life of the good man must appear a life of bondage. The man who has no ear for music would regard the ecstasies of a Handel as ridiculous; but such ecstasies are not on that account the less real.

3. There is still a *third* sense, of which the words, with-

out supplement, are susceptible,—a sense I have not seen given, but which appears to me to have as fair a claim to be the true one as either of those mentioned:—"The doing, or executing of judgment is joy to the just, but destruction to the workers of iniquity." The just, when judgment is done, have no cause to fear:—it comes not upon them: "only with their eyes they behold, and see the reward of the wicked;" and they experience "joy," when it is *just* judgment that is executed, inasmuch as it promotes the safety and the happiness of society. And the "doing of judgment" by the Judge of all, which is ever according to perfect rectitude, is "joy to the just," as it brings glory to His name, and clears the moral universe of temptation and misery. But to "the workers of iniquity," the execution of judgment is anything but "joy." It is *destruction*; and the thought and anticipation of it, whether from man or from God, can engender only distress and fear. And the day of final judgment, while it shall be a day of "joy" to the just, will be the day of complete and irremediable "destruction" to the wicked.\*

Verse 16. "The man that wandereth out of the way of understanding shall remain in the congregation of the dead."—While the preceding verse has reference to the "workers of iniquity" generally, and represents the execution of judgment as their "destruction;" *this* verse relates apparently to *apostates* from the right way—"the way of understanding;" those who for a time have walked in that way, under a profession of religion, and have abandoned it. Such there have been in every age; and of such it is here said, "they shall remain in the congregation of *the dead*." The word so rendered happens to be in some other places of the Old Testament translated *giants*—with doubtful propriety, for in the first of its occurrences (Gen. xiv. 5.) it is the name of a people, the "*Rephaim*." It is the same word that is translated *giants* in Deut. ii. 11, 20; Josh. xii. 4; xiii. 12;

\* Luther renders—"It is to the righteous a joy to do what is right; but to the wicked a terror."

xvii. 15;—but it is disputed whether it should not in these instances retain its appellative signification. Supposing this—still the people were a gigantic race; and from this, apparently, has arisen the confounding of the word used in our text with that rendered *giants* in the fourth verse of the sixth chapter of Genesis. But the words are not at all the same:—and the word in the last-cited passage has been the subject of a large amount of critical discussion and variety of conjecture. But from the obvious fact of the *Nephilim* (called *giants* in the account of the antediluvian world) being men of signally desperate wickedness as well as of vast stature and power, it has been concluded that *the abode of the giants* came to be a designation for the place of future punishment, or some region of it;—and it has been imagined that this is what is meant here by “the congregation of the *giants*.” There is, however, in all this more of conjecture and fancy than of certainty. The same word is rendered “*dead*”\* in several other places. I shall not trouble you with the etymologies of the original word, from which the sense of “*dead*” is made out. It will be enough to remark, that here, as in the other passages referred to, it must be understood as meaning the *wicked dead*. This is clear from the very nature of the thing; and it is confirmed by the connexion of the 18th verse in the second chapter with the verse which follows. The “congregation of the dead,” then, means the assembly of those who were spiritually dead here, and who, having departed out of this world, are suffering, in the world to come, that “second death” which is “the wages of sin.” In all such connexions there is included under the idea of *death* that of *destruction* in general.†

I have said that “the man who wanders out of the way of understanding” has special reference to apostasy from a religious profession and course. The verse may be interpreted as expressing the increasing hardness, the consequent comparative hopelessness, and the final and irremediable misery, of

\* See for example, chap. ii. 18; ix. 18.

† Comp. chap. viii. 34—36.

such characters. This is no strange doctrine in the word of God. It is taught and impressed everywhere.\* Let professors, then, beware of backsliding. Having entered on "the way of understanding," let them beware of the infatuation of "wandering out of it." O let nothing entice, nothing intimidate you! Keep the way which conscience and experience tell you is the right way. Keep it to the end. Set your faces as a flint. "Press toward the mark, for the prize of your high calling." Let neither the world, the devil, nor the flesh, prevail. "Be faithful unto death, and your Lord will give you the crown of life."

Verse 17. "He that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man; he that loveth wine and oil shall not be rich." The sentiment here is similar to that in various preceding passages of the Book. In the nature of things, and as evinced by experience, the *tendency* of extravagance in living is to poverty and its accompanying miseries. How should it be otherwise? Money is squandered, debt is incurred, credit is lost, the divine blessing is forfeited—that blessing which can alone secure prosperity. The man who follows such a course "shall not be rich"—neither rich for time nor for eternity.—It is not necessary to interpret "*pleasure*" here as signifying directly vicious pleasure, or criminal indulgence. On the margin it is rendered "*sport*:" and when connected with the latter member of the verse, the whole may be considered as including the pleasures of the table, luxurious refinements, costly establishments, foolish pastimes, and all the modes of what the men of the world call "*enjoying life*," even apart from the profligacy of voluptuousness.

Verse 18. "The wicked shall be a ransom for the righteous, and the transgressor for the upright." This is evidently intended to express the regard of Jehovah to his people; a sentiment which pervades His word, and is to them full of consolation and delight, while it is a lesson of solemn alarm to the ungodly.† The words may be interpreted in

\* Comp. Heb. x. 26—31; 2 Pet. ii. 20, 21.

† Comp. Psal. xl.; xxxiv. 6, 7, 15, 16; xxxvii. 12—18.

two senses, which, however, are closely connected:—*First*, when the wicked form purposes of evil against the righteous, God frequently makes these evil purposes return upon themselves, and involve themselves in the very mischief they meant for his people.—*Secondly*, when the wicked stand in the way of the best interests of the righteous, and their general well-being,—that is, of what God sees to be truly best for them,—He will sacrifice the one to the other. The words of God by the prophet, may throw light on the phraseology of the verse before us:—“For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour: I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee. Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life,” Isa. xliii. 3, 4. How was Egypt “*a ransom?*”—not in the strict and proper sense of the word: but when Israel was to be delivered, and Egypt, the oppressor, stood in the way, the deliverance was effected at the cost of Egypt,—by plagues on her people and land, and the destruction of her armies. Thus, in aftertimes was the army of Sennacherib sacrificed for the deliverance of good king Hezekiah and his people, when, in the time of their perplexity and peril, they cried unto the Lord. Thus did the plots of the wicked Haman for the destruction of Mordecai and the Jews come back upon himself. In the end, all “the wicked” that have opposed “the righteous,” and done what they could to frustrate their salvation, shall become, for their sakes, the victims of the divine displeasure.\*

Verse 19. “It is better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and an angry woman.” We had the sentiment before us in last Lecture; and I only now observe, that it is still more strongly expressed here than even there. There the unfortunate victim of female passion and fretfulness and clamour, retires to the *house-top*. But here, even the house-top is too near. He is off to “*the wilderness*”—as far away as possible. The roof of the house is not a

\* See Matt. xxv. 41—45.

sufficient separation. He still hears the din. He is still too much within reach of the scourge of the tongue; he flees the house altogether. "The wilderness," with all its discomforts and all its dangers, is better. The yelling of its savage beasts is not so frightful as that from which he escapes.

But let me repeat that the cases that call for pity are far from being all on one side. Are there no unreasonable, passionate, discontented, fretful, savage, brutal husbands? Alas, how many! I do believe the number of suffering wives is greater than that of suffering husbands. "A contentious woman," says an authority from whom I have this morning quoted already\*—"is not worse than a tyrannizing husband. A man may more easily make his escape from the presence of a scold, than a woman from the face of a brutal tyrant; and the delicacy of her mind makes her more susceptible of melancholy impressions from bad usage, than persons of the other sex ordinarily are." This witness is true. Ah! how many gentle and affectionate spirits—how many women who are only prevented from being the very best of wives by the treatment they receive, by the felt impossibility of pleasing an unreasonable, conciliating a proud and passionate, or reclaiming an intemperate and faithless husband,—have pined out their days in wretchedness, and sunk, broken-hearted, into the grave! O! when husband and wife dwell together in love and peace,—amid the calm yet exquisite joys of domestic life,—how grateful they should be! They possess the best of earthly boons that heaven bestows. They drink of the purest and sweetest spring of pleasure opened to men in passing on to the world of eternity. Let them drink with humble and thankful cheerfulness, feeling their dependence, owning their obligations, even while they never forget the uncertainty and necessary shortness of all that pertains to time,—never forget that every connubial union must, sooner or later, be dissolved; and holding themselves in readiness for parting

\* Dr. Lawson.

even while they are in the full enjoyment of their earthly happiness. That happiness is crowned and perfected, when on the tie of nature there is superinduced the bond of grace; and there is thus an everlasting as well as a temporary union. Let this be the aim—and may this be the happiness—of every wedded pair in this assembly!

Verse 20. "There is treasure to be desired and oil in the dwelling of the wise; but a foolish man spendeth it up." There is an evident correspondence between this verse and verse seventeenth. They may be regarded either as *contrasts* or as *counterparts* to each other. "*The wise*" and the *righteous* are in this book the same,—wisdom consisting specially in "the fear of the Lord;" and on the same principle, "*the foolish*" and *the wicked* are the same. The verse has clearly a reference to *temporal* things. The "*treasure*" is earthly treasure; the "*oil*," that of worldly prosperity and abundance. When the treasure is called "*treasure to be desired*," it seems to be designed to mark the difference between the treasure that is gotten by industry, prudence, frugality, and justice; and that which is gotten by unrighteousness, fraud, and oppression;—between the treasure in the house of "the wise" and the treasure in the house of "the foolish." The former alone is "treasure to be desired," as being obtained rightly and used rightly; and as being obtained *by* the divine blessing and enjoyed *with* it. The "treasure" and the "oil" may in themselves be the same. But of everything earthly there is an adventitious as well as an intrinsic value. The "treasure" which is obtained and enjoyed otherwise than we have described, is *not* "to be desired." A man is better with nothing than with "treasure" gotten wickedly—gotten by a lying tongue—gotten by theft or robbery—gotten by oppressive grinding of the faces of the poor—gotten as a bribe for evil—gotten in any way that sets conscience and God against its owner;—and better far with nothing than with "treasure" in the *use* of which God and the claims of benevolence are forgotten; in the use of which, a man seeks as his sole end to gratify self, and is thus "treasuring up unto himself

wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God."

"*But a foolish man spendeth it up.*" This may either mean that the foolish man spendeth up *his own* treasure; so that whatever he acquires is speedily, through his own mismanagement, or extravagance, or abuse, consumed and gone;—or that the wise man has a fool for his successor—to whom his treasures go, and by whom they are soon exhausted:—"Yea, I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun: because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me. And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool? yet shall he have rule over all my labour wherein I have laboured, and wherein I have showed myself wise under the sun. This is also vanity."—Ecc. ii. 18, 19.

How true the closing words of this passage—"This is also vanity!" "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity!"—is the text of the book; and this is only one of its many illustrations and proofs. In "the dwelling of the wise" there are treasures infinitely more precious than any this world can furnish;—treasures of spiritual blessing,—unsearchable riches—riches that "perish not in the using." He is rich in possession, and rich in hope, rich in time and rich for eternity. "THE WISE" and "THE FOOLISH" shall divide mankind at last. To which of the two assemblies would you belong? You *may* to either. It depends upon your own choice. God says—"Ye fools, when will ye be wise?" He shuts up none to final privation and suffering, but those who voluntarily and pertinaciously shut themselves up to folly. The gospel is the wisdom of God for our salvation; and it is *our* wisdom to receive it.



## LECTURE LXVII.

PROV. XXI. 21—31.

“ He that followeth after righteousness and mercy findeth life, righteousness, and honour. A wise man scaleth the city of the mighty, and casteth down the strength of the confidence thereof. Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue, keepeth his soul from troubles. Proud and haughty scorner is his name, who dealeth in proud wrath. The desire of the slothful killeth him; for his hands refuse to labour. He coveteth greedily all the day long; but the righteous giveth and spareth not. The sacrifice of the wicked is abomination: how much more, when he bringeth it with a wicked mind? A false witness shall perish; but the man that heareth speaketh constantly. A wicked man hardeneth his face: but as for the upright, he directeth his way. There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the Lord. The horse is prepared against the day of battle: but safety is of the Lord.”

“**RIGHTEOUSNESS AND MERCY**” are the two great divisions of moral duty between man and man. In the Bible, as might be expected, they stand associated with a third—**GODLINESS**; that which forms the principle of the duties which man owes to his Maker and moral Governor.\* There is nothing to which men are more prone than to put these asunder; and while, to a certain extent, practising towards their fellow-men what justice and humanity require, to leave out of their estimate of their characters altogether the affections and the conduct that arise from, and are required by, that primary obligation, that takes precedence of, and indeed is inclusive of, all others,—the obligation of every intelligent creature to God. The overlooking of this is the most affecting proof of human de-

\* Comp. Tit. ii. 11, 12; Mic. vi. 8.

pravity, and the most prolific cause of human delusion. But, apart from the union, in Scripture, of these *three* branches of character, it may be noticed, that the word "*righteousness*" is frequently taken in a more comprehensive sense,—as a term for human duty at large, as it is also a term for all the moral excellence of Deity.\* And when we recollect that "*righteousness*" consists in *giving every one his due*, why should it not include the *first of all dues*, that which is *due to God*? If it is unrighteous to withhold that which is due, the *ungodly* man is, in the highest sense, the *unrighteous* man. He fails to pay the first and most imperative of his debts. If there can be no claim equal to God's, there can be no iniquity equal to the violation of it.—*Benevolence* is one of the primary elements of the divine character. And it is the law of the moral universe. Love is the fulfilling of that law. God has made love *due* from creature to creature, as well as from the creature to Himself. And *he* can neither imitate God, nor obey Him, who does not follow after "*mercy*" as well as "*righteousness*."

He who "*followeth after*"—who habitually and perseveringly practises these virtues, "*findeth life*." He has a truly *happy* life. He has God's presence and blessing; and these are life,—life's true zest and joy.† He also "*findeth righteousness*." The man of high principle, who is noted for his strict uprightness, will generally meet with a return in kind. Few, comparatively, will attempt to cheat the thoroughly honest dealer. Knaves themselves will be awed into honesty by the knowledge of his character. And he "*finds honour*;"—when in any case "*righteousness and mercy*" are eminently united; when a man not only adheres strictly to the imperative demands of *justice*, but lays himself out for the benefit of others—at a cost of toil and trouble, and self-denial and sacrifice,—"*honour*" will be his due; and honour he will obtain. It will attend upon him while he lives, and it will be attached to his name when he is gone hence. There may be a *kind* of greatness arising from mere vastness of in-

\* See 1 John iii. 7; ii. 29.

† Comp. Phil. iv. 8, 9.

telleet and mightiness of power, working wonders in the earth, and affecting now and for ages to come, the destinies of nations. But where there has been no principle; where there has been neither "righteousness" nor "mercy," but the flagrant violation of both, the very page of history, which records the greatness, records with it the dishonour; associating with the magnitude of the events, and the magnitude of mental and physical resources by which they were brought about, the brand of moral reprobation. The only true, living, lasting "honour" is that which is gained by the operation of great moral principles, for all real greatness lies in moral worth. Even in life, the man of self-denying generosity will be so valued, and so honoured, that others will be ready to risk and sacrifice life itself for his preservation. "For a *good* man some would even dare to die."

But higher and better blessings may be meant. These, indeed, are not, in God's word, associated, in the way of *merit* on the creature's part, or of *reward* on His, with the practice of "righteousness and mercy;"—but "life, righteousness, and honour" are ever connected with the character.\*

Verse 22. "A wise man scaeth the city of the mighty, and casteth down the strength of the confidence thereof." The proverb has had, at times, a literal fulfilment. Look at ancient Babylon. With its insurmountable walls and bulwarks, it seemed secure; and its monarch could smile in proud defiance at the power of the mightiest assailants. But Cyrus had something besides military force. He had *wisdom*; and the turning of the course of the Euphrates, and entering by its channel, accomplished what force could not in any way effect; and in an unexpected moment,—a moment of careless and fearless mirth and revelry, and glorying in the impregnable security of its lofty and massive muniments,—was "the strength of the confidence" of Babylon "cast down." The language refers, however, under a particular illustration, to the *conquering of great difficulties* in general—affirming that, for this end, wisdom is much more effectual than mere physical

\* Rom. vi. 20—22; Psal. xxiv. 3—5; Rom. ii. 6—11.

force. Force, without wisdom, very frequently, instead of gaining its objects, impedes and frustrates them. The "wise man" proceeds with cautious and considerate prudence,—with appropriate adjustment of means and methods to the circumstances and the characters with which he has to deal. And, in the case of the godly, the wisdom that consists in the fear of the Lord, will, in every season of perplexity and difficulty, look upward for divine direction, and guide itself by the light of the divine word.\* It is thus that the good man encounters and overcomes spiritual opposition lying in the way of his course heavenward. In the strength of divinely promised aid, he "casts down the strength of the confidence" of his spiritual adversaries, and is made "more than conqueror."

Verse 23. "Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue, keepeth his soul from troubles." Here we have still another characteristic and another advantage of *wisdom*. It enables its possessor to "*keep the mouth and the tongue*"—to know the "time to be silent, and the time to speak," and *in* the time to speak, *what to say*. We have had repeated occasion to notice the incalculable amount and variety of mischief of which the tongue is the occasion; how its openly uttered or secretly whispered words may break hearts, may ruin characters, may sever friends, may bring individuals and families to beggary and disgrace, may spread alienation and discord through extensive circles of intimacy and affection, may "pierce through with many sorrows" spirits that were enjoying peace and love, may be even as barbed daggers that take away life; how too they recoil in mischief to *ourselves*; how a word of slander brought out in a moment of irritation or thoughtlessness, may cost a man the humiliation of submissive apology, or the annoyance and expense of litigation, and the reparation of heavy damages; how the recollection of a hasty expression, along with the effects which have arisen from it to those to whom at the time no harm was meant, may inflict severe and long-continued self-reproach, with all its accom-

\* See chap. iii. 5, 6.

paniments of mental disquietude and distress ; how the foolish utterances of an unguarded hour may go far to shake the credit of years of discretion—the recollection of that hour of folly ever returning upon the mind of previous admirers, and, if not absolutely obliterating their former estimate of a man's sound sense and dignity, operating at least as a serious drawback on their respect for his character ; how too it leads to inward deep remorse, arising from a consciousness of having spoken inconsistently with our Christian profession and principles, and the thought of having given an unfavourable impression of our religion, and failed of an opportunity of honouring God—a thought than which to a Christian heart there is none more galling, spirit-sinking, and severe :—associated as it is with proportionate diminution of interest in Christ, and of the validity of our confidence towards God.—It is indeed emphatically true that “whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue, *keepeth his soul from troubles.*”

Verse 24. “Proud and haughty scorner is his name, who dealeth in proud wrath.” To “deal in proud wrath,”—on the margin, “in the wrath of pride,”—evidently means to act with the overbearing violence of a haughty spirit. All the conduct of such a man is insolently self-sufficient, and, when resisted, furious. The proud man is puffed up. He thinks all should at once yield to his will and wishes, and can bear with patience no opposition. This of course is a character that can never be liked. It stirs up the pride and passion of others. It becomes the object of universal indignation and disgust. Hence the man gets himself a name of reproach : he shall be called “*proud and haughty scorner* :” and in his name he finds his punishment : for true it is, that the proudest of men does not like being *called proud* ; as the man who deals most in lies may like least to be called a liar. A “*proud scorner*” is one of the most unpopular and odious of characters. From him whom men thus designate, all will keep aloof. And in a world where all are necessarily so much dependent upon one another, in despite of a man's self-concentrated pride and contempt of his fellows, it is not every one that can afford to adopt and

live upon the maxim of the tyrant—"Let them hate me, so they but fear me!" Thus he who, by his unbearable temper, "sets himself alone in the earth," may be forced to feel the inconveniences of being without the good-will even of those whom he professes to scorn.

Verses 25, 26. "The desire of the slothful killeth him; for his hands refuse to labour. He coveteth greedily all the day long: but the righteous giveth, and spareth not." The word of God is characterised by its *variety*. Even on the same subject, how frequently soever introduced, there may generally be found some diversity in the position it occupies,—the light in which it is presented; some new phase in its source, its nature, or its results. The evil effects of *sloth* have been before us oftener than most points on which the wise man touches. Here it is again. We dwell only on the new aspect under which it appears. It is presented to us first, as a species of self-murder:—"The desire of the slothful *killeth him*:" and why?—"for his hands refuse to labour." He will not work, and he cannot want. He "desires" certain acquisitions and indulgences; but his hands refuse to second his wishes. He cannot bring them to the necessary exertion; and so his unsatisfied desire gnaws, torments, wastes, irritates, destroys him. There is nothing more irksome than the longing, yawning, fretting yearnings of the indolent wretch who will not help himself. They are miserable; and they are suicidal; they "kill him." Mere "desiring" that the ground were tilled will not till it. Mere wishing for money and food will not create either the one or the other. So that if he only "*desires*" life, but will do nothing to sustain it, he must *die*.\* Another aspect of the same evil is that it engenders and maintains the spirit of a grasping grudging covetousness: "*He coveteth greedily all the day long*." He sees others in the possession and enjoyment of what he wants. He longs after the same, but he will do nothing to obtain it. He sets his heart on all he sees, and pines away in that "envy which is the rottenness of the

\* Comp. Eccl. iv. 5.

bones." In the Paris French translation the words stand thus—"All the day long he does nothing but wish." How very expressive at once of the unconquerable indolence and the fretful, envious, pining unhappiness of the sluggard! And in his wishing, he may at times, by the power of a sanguine imagination, work himself into hope; and then, disappointment only embitters the cup of his own mingling,—aggravates the misery, which he is painfully conscious is self-inflicted.—Further: he appears before us a stranger to all the positive and exquisite pleasures of charity and beneficence; but "the righteous *giveth and spareth not.*" It is not said, you will observe—"the *diligent* giveth and spareth not;" because there are not a few who are sufficiently exemplary in diligence, to whom the Bible would not give the designation of "*the righteous*,"—and who are far from being distinguished for benevolence. But the antithesis, as it stands here, implies these three things: *First*, that *diligence* is one of the features in the character of the *righteous*:—*Secondly*, that the natural tendency, and ordinary result of this is, through the divine blessing, abundance to spare:—*Thirdly*, that another distinguishing feature of the character of the *righteous* man, *readiness to part* with what his industry acquires—"giving, and *not sparing*;" that is, giving cheerfully, and giving liberally; not assenting merely to the truth of the maxim, as being the word of the Lord, but *feeling* the truth of it in their own heart's experience—"It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Verse 27. "The sacrifice of the wicked is abomination: how much more, when he bringeth it with a wicked mind?" The sentiment of the former part of the verse we have already illustrated,\* showing by an appeal to many explicit passages in the Old Testament, that, unless the *character of the worshipper* was in correspondence with the worship offered by him, that worship, instead of being acceptable to the "Holy One of Israel," to the pure, truth-loving, and heart-

\* Chap. xv. 8.

searching God, was held by him in abhorrence, and indignantly rejected.

What, then, is the *addition* to this truth, in the latter part of this verse?—"How much more, when he bringeth it with a wicked mind?" The meaning seems to be—when not only is the worshipper's general character at variance with the religious service, but when the particular act of devotion itself is performed *with an evil design*—as a cloak or cover to some wicked purpose:—when a man comes before the God of truth for a purpose of falsehood,—a purpose suggested by the father of lies; concealing by a profession made to God some work of the devil. We have an instance in the history of Jezebel.\* There was a *fast*—a religious service to Jehovah—proclaimed, with the express object of covering the perpetration of one of the most nefarious deeds of treachery and murder recorded in the Bible history. The case of Balaam is another. He ordered the building at successive places, of his seven altars, and offered his bullock and his ram on every altar. But all the while he was "loving the wages of unrighteousness;" and, for the sake of these wages, trying to bribe the Almighty into a permission to him to curse Israel. Look also at our Lord's representation of the character of the hypocritical Pharisees; in which He seems plainly to point at something more than general dissimulation—the studied covering of the very act of robbery—the robbery of the widow and the fatherless—by some accompanying act of extraordinary devotion.† There are degrees in sin. There are aggravating circumstances in the same *kinds* of sin. There is wickedness in all hypocrisy—in all religious dissimulation,—there being no one thing in which "simplicity and godly sincerity" are more imperatively required than the services of religion; but of all religious dissimulation *that* must be the most heinous, in which an act of worship is performed expressly to cover and facilitate the execution of an act of villany; when a worshipper bows before the God of mercy and truth, with the assassin's

\* See 1 Kings xxi. 9, 10, &c.

† Matt. xxiii. 14; Luke xx. 47.



dagger under his garment; or confesses and prays to “the righteous Lord who loveth righteousness” to preclude suspicion,—to inspire confidence in his holy character, that he may the more easily succeed in pillaging the poor!—Let all remember, that the same kind of guilt, though in various degrees, is contracted, when a man assumes, in the public worship of God, any airs of ultra devotion,—any sanctimonious ostentation and grimace, for the purpose of getting a character for religion, and so enabling him, under the cloak of such a reputation, to obtain credit and confidence, while he is, in his business, carrying forward a system of dishonourable and swindling speculation or embezzlement. O! of what is not human nature, under the dominance of unprincipled selfishness, capable!

Verse 28. “A false witness shall perish; but the man that heareth speaketh constantly.” Here too we have former truth, with some addition to it. “*A false witness*” is, on the margin, “*a witness of lies.*” It probably means here a witness who gives in evidence inventions of his own, that he knows to have no foundation in fact. It stands in antithesis to—“*the man that heareth.*” This some critics understand in a sense which the occasional use of the verb *to hear* certainly justifies,—“the man that *obeyeth.*” But, in the present instance, this seems rather forced. “The man that *heareth,*” or *who hath heard,* is the witness who has personal knowledge of the case—who has been present on the spot and has listened to what passed.

The former “shall *perish:*” he shall fail in his cause, entangling himself in the meshes of his own inventions,—falsehood being seldom in all points consistent,—and so bring ruin upon himself in this life, and be visited with perdition in the end. Not so in regard to the latter: “the man that heareth speaketh *constantly.*” If we abide by this translation, the meaning is—that he who has heard *persists uniformly in the same statements.\** Truth is

\* Stuart considers the meaning to be, “that the sincere listener to the divine commands will ever be at liberty to speak,” and “find confidence put in what he says.”

always consistent. No cross-questioning can elicit any incoherence. It needs nothing to help it out; nor is it ever in hesitation or at a loss. It is free, open, ready; delivering its testimony without apprehension, knowing that all is in harmony. But the original more properly signifies "*unto victory*." One French version has it—"shall speak so as to gain the cause;" another—"shall speak, and shall have the victory." This too is the sense given by the Latin Vulgate. The idea seems to be that the consistency of truth shall triumph over the artifice and chicanery of falsehood and deceit. The perjurer may for a time seem to have the better of the cause; but ultimately the witness of lies shall be exposed, and the witness of truth shall be triumphant.

My brethren, we are all hastening to a tribunal where accuser, and witness, and judge, shall all be ONE. God is now the inspector of all our actions, and the hearer of all our words; and at the great day, He will not need that any should testify to him of man. There will be no need for calling witnesses, on whose testimony to found the verdicts of that day. "He that sitteth upon the throne" shall have a perfect intuitive knowledge of every individual of the countless myriads that shall then appear at His bar,—an unerringly distinct remembrance of every particular in the conduct and history of each, and of the motives by which, on every occasion, he was actuated. Conscience, however successfully bribed to a partial testimony now, will then respond to the truth of every charge. And when to those whom He places on his left hand, the Judge shall say, "Depart from me, ye cursed!" there will be no plea possible in arrest of the sentence. "These shall go away into everlasting punishment." And the same omniscient and unerring Judge shall "justify the righteous." Placing them on his right hand, he will welcome them to blessedness; and all their adversaries shall be ashamed; not a lip daring to open against them, or in impeachment of their sentence.\*

\* Rom. viii. 31, 33—39,

Verse 29. "A wicked man hardeneth his face: but as for the upright, he directeth his way."—The "*wicked man*" has good cause to be *ashamed*. His actions are such as give him plentiful reason to blush; but he blushes not. He "*hardens his face*." He assumes the air of impudent effrontery; braves the searching gaze of others; bids them the defiance of an unmoved countenance. He thus seeks to command an impression of his innocence. He has learned the lesson of concealing the secrets of conscience. His desire and his study are, to attain the power of sinning without blushing; and it is wonderful what an amount of this command of countenance some have reached. There is no discerning from their looks the slightest symptom of conscious guilt; while the innocent may blush crimson at the very thought of being so much as charged with the evil, and exposing themselves to suspicion that has no ground.—"Hardening the face," signifies also determined self-will, that is unmoved by expostulation, and proof against warning,—equally scornful of entreaty and of threatening—of love and of fear. Such was the character of God's ancient people, in their times of rebellion against Him.\* It required divinely imparted courage and self-command to be able to face them.

Mark the other side of the antithesis:—"but the upright *directeth*," or, as on the margin, "*considereth his way*."—This may include two things:—1. His great desire and aim are, by a due consideration of his way, so to direct and order it, that he may have *no cause for shame*, and no need for command of countenance to conceal conscious guilt. While a blush may at times suffuse the cheek of conscious innocence at the very imputation of evil, it will soon pass away, and the naturalness of modest truth will inspire confidence in all who witness it. He would not "quench the blushes of ingenuous shame;" but he endeavours so to speak, and so to act, as that he shall have no reason to hide his head or cover his face,—far less to "*harden*" it. 2. The upright man is influenced by such a self-diffident

\* Jer. v. 2, 3; viii. 12: Ezek. iii. 7—9.

consciousness of his liability to say and to do what is wrong, that when anything of the kind is imputed to him, or surmised against him, he humbly "considers his way." He is led to self-examination,—to ascertain whether, through want of due watchfulness, he may not have erred. So far from "hardening his face" like a man who had such conceit of himself as to imagine that he *could not* do aught amiss, and that his only feeling under any imputation should be that of indignant scorn,—he is rather induced, in humility of spirit, to the more sincere and fervent adoption of the psalmist's prayer:—"Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting," Psa. cxxxix. 23, 24.

O let the second of these characters be yours! A hardened heart and a hardened face,—a face that has learned to brave accusation and to look innocent under conscious guilt, are the most undesirable of all attainments. The confusion of innocence, when evil is imputed, is far preferable. Better far to *be* innocent and thought guilty, than to be guilty and thought innocent. Better far to have the sentence of acquittal in our own bosoms, though condemned by men, than to succeed in getting acquittal from men, and carry within us the sentence of guilt. How painful soever the former, we can still look up to God, and forward to *His* tribunal, as that of unerring rectitude,—where *He* will "bring forth our righteousness as the light, and our judgment as the noon-day." O! there will be no "hardening of the face" then. Conscience will do its duty. The eyes which are as a flame of fire will search the inmost soul. Every eye will quail, and every countenance, even the most hardened, sink, before the look of Him that sitteth upon the throne. He will then at once "wipe off the reproach of his people," and "bring to light the hidden things of darkness." And then they who, under the influence of faith, and fear, and love, have "considered their way," shall lift up their faces without dread, and meet the smiles of their gracious Judge!

We may, perhaps, consider the wise man as pointing out *three modes* of covering and effecting evil purposes:—in the twenty-seventh verse, the *mask of religion*; in the twenty-eighth, *false testimony*; in the twenty-ninth, the *assumed boldness and look of innocence*. But (verse 30) “there is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel, against the Lord.” There may be against *men*. In one, or other, or all of these ways they may be deceived. There may, in many cases, be “wisdom and understanding and counsel,” more than sufficient to impose upon and outwit them. But God *knows all*. His eye cannot be eluded; His designs cannot be thwarted; neither His promises nor His threatenings can be falsified, by any artifice, or policy, or might of the children of men,—no, nor of any created being.

And, as there is “no wisdom, understanding, or counsel” against the Lord, so neither is there *power*:—verse 31. “The horse is prepared against the day of battle: but safety is of the Lord.” Sometimes, in the history of His ancient people, the Lord adopted means in themselves utterly inadequate,—absolutely trivial and powerless,—and granted the most signal success, for the purpose of conveying and impressing the lesson, that even when the best-equipped and most powerful armaments were employed, it was *on Him* they were still to depend,—and neither previously to confide, nor subsequently to glory, in their own resources, and might, and skill. Thus it was in the case of the reduction of their vast army to the “three hundred,” by whom the immense hosts of Midian were overthrown. And, in a similar manner, and at a most appropriate time, was the great lesson inculcated,—just when they were setting out on the conquest of the land of promise. By what means was the first city overthrown? By means which, but for the rumours that had come to their ears, the inhabitants might well have “laughed to scorn”—by successive processions round it, and the repeated blast of trumpets. This was manifestly designed to show them at the very outset *to whom they were to owe* the subjugation and possession of the land. It was an important and salutary lesson; and it is the very senti-

ment to which, in their hymns of acknowledgment and praise, the ancient church gave utterance.\*

Let us, as we are taught to do, generalize the sentiment:—  
 “Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.” †

“Fond mortals but themselves beguile,  
 When on themselves they rest:  
 Blind is their wisdom, weak their toil,  
 By thee, O Lord, unblest!”

Safe and happy is the man, and he alone, who “trusteth in Jehovah,” for “in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength.”

And let me remind all, that the principle is applicable to means of safety from other and greater than temporal evils or created enemies. “*Safety—salvation* is of the Lord.” He has made known *His* way of security from the wrath to come. Men may devise and follow schemes of their own: but none but His can be safe. “There is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel,” in *this* matter, “against the Lord.” His counsel shall stand. Ah! sinners, what plans soever of your own you may embrace, you will find the truth of this in the end. Christ is the only refuge. “There is no salvation in any other.” When Israel were penitent, they owned the worthless insufficiency of all the means of protection in which they had previously trusted, and cast themselves on the power and mercy of their own Jehovah. ‡ Thus must it be with every penitent sinner. The very first thing he does is to renounce all his previous confidences, and betake himself to that *one* which Jehovah has provided and revealed.—And then, there is to the end a spiritual warfare, in which “safety is of the Lord.” We cannot cope with our spiritual enemies but in *His* strength. We must be “strong in the Lord.” We must be made conquerors “through him that loved us.” “Through God we shall do valiantly: for he it is that shall tread down our enemies.”

\* Psa. xliv. 1—8.

† Psa. cxxvii. 1.

‡ Hosea xiv. 1—3

## LECTURE LXVIII.

—◆—  
PROV. XXII. 1—6.

“A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold. The rich and poor meet together; the Lord is the maker of them all. A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished. By humility, and the fear of the Lord, are riches, honour, and life. Thorns and snares are in the way of the froward; he that doth keep his soul shall be far from them. Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old he will not depart from it.”

You will observe that the word “good” in the first of these verses is a supplement. In the original we have simply “*a name*.” But this does not mean a mere name of *renown*. The verse must not be understood as a justification of the *love of fame* as a principle of action. Nor is it to be interpreted as expressing a preference of *ambition* to *avarice*,—of the love of *power* to the love of *wealth*. Many, alas! have there been, who, from mere eagerness to be distinguished,—with little consideration of either the nature or the means of the distinction,—have succeeded in “making themselves a name;” but a name which ought to be a name of *infamy* rather than of *honour*. They have been great in power, and great in renown for all the evil which power without principle rendered them capable of doing. Solomon does not assuredly mean *such* a name. The “good” is a *proper* supplement. “A good name” is a reputation among fellow-men for piety, wisdom, prudence, integrity, generosity, and any other virtues that enter into a *good character*. But remember it is not a mere *reputation* for these. They must not be *assumed in appearance*, and a reputation thus got for the *reality*. To a

man's own inward enjoyment there can be few things more opposed than a high reputation for qualities which there is no consciousness of possessing, but rather a consciousness that, if all were known, the feeling toward him would be reversed. This in itself must be worse than unsatisfactory, it must be most fretting and mortifying to a man's spirit,—exciting the gnawing irksomeness of self-indignant scorn; besides the incessantly haunting apprehension of the truth coming out, and the shame of detection.

Observe, the character is one which is not held in admiration only, but in *affection*:—"and loving favour rather than silver and gold." The "*loving favour*" is the affectionate esteem which springs from the "good name," and which is drawn by it to the person. In the *first* place, the "good name" and "loving favour" are more really pleasing in themselves—imparting more of true happiness than "silver and gold" in whatever amount—than all the riches of earth. The satisfaction is comparatively low and grovelling, which a person receives from the mere possession of wealth. It may be common to him with men of the lowest standard both in mental and moral worth. There is no saying how mean or how bad a man may be, and yet come into possession of "silver and gold," and "great riches." The satisfaction that arises from *character* is of a much higher and purer description; more worthy far of being coveted and valued. To a man of sensibility, indeed, few things can be more dear than a "good name." By such a man his purse will ever be esteemed as "trash" in the comparison. Few things are more distressingly painful to him than when any injurious suspicion is thrown upon his character. The full enjoyment of a fair fame is intensely gratifying. Hence arises a danger—(for what is there from which, to our deceitful hearts, danger does not arise?)—the danger of "thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought to think,"—and of making a *righteousness* of our "good name,"—getting secretly elated by it—and deriving a measure of self-gratulation and self-confidence from it even before God, and in the prospect of our final account. Hence also arises a ne-



cessity for self-jealousy. It is well for him who in any degree enjoys, and knows that he enjoys it, to counteract the tendency by looking to those evils *in the sight of God*, of which he must be a wonderful man who is not sensible:—to go over these in the secret chambers of conscience, those chambers to which no eye has access but his own and his God's. When he thus faithfully brings his heart and life to the test of the spiritual law of omniscience, he will find enough to prevent his being puffed up—enough to make him feel deeply his unworthiness of the divine regard, and of even the very lowest place in “the kingdom of heaven,”—enough, amidst the affectionate tributes of admiration from his fellow-creatures, to draw from his inmost and heavy-laden spirit the prayer—“God be merciful to me a sinner!”

*Secondly*,—the one is more valuable than the other as a means of *usefulness*. *Riches*, in themselves, can only enable a man to promote the *temporal* comfort and well-being of those around him. But *character* gives him weight of influence in matters of higher moment,—in all descriptions of salutary advice and direction,—in kindly instruction and consolation,—in counsel *for eternity*. It not only fits its possessor for such employments, but it imparts energy and effect to whatever he says and does. His character carries a recommendation with it,—gives authority and force to every lesson and every admonition; and affords, by the confidence it inspires, many opportunities and means of doing good, which, without it, could not be enjoyed.—*Riches*, again, bring with them many temptations to sinful and worldly indulgences, such as are injurious to the possessor himself and to his family—both temporally and spiritually. *Character*, on the contrary, acts as a salutary restraint,—keeping a man back from many improprieties and follies, and even outward sins, by which it would be impaired and forfeited. And this restraint is felt, and properly felt, not for his own sake merely, but for the sake of all those objects with which his name stands associated; and especially from a regard to usefulness in connexion with the *truth*, and *cause*, and *church* of Christ. This is a

very solemn consideration to a child of God. O remember, it is not your riches or your poverty, your high or low condition, that is an honour on the one hand, or a reproach on the other, to the name and doctrine of your divine Master, and a means of promoting or hindering the reception and progress of His gospel; it is your consistent character,—your high and blameless reputation. How vast the good *this* does—this preaching of the gospel by the life—in every circle in which a man moves!—and O what essential, and often extensive injury springs from the contrary—from the *name* without the *reality* of religion,—without consistent practical godliness! It was this consideration that led the Apostle Paul to set so high a value upon his “good name,” and made him so solicitous to preserve it free not only of reproach, but even of suspicion. His official usefulness was involved in it, as well as his personal satisfaction. A reflection on *him* was a reflection on his cause, and a hindrance to his apostolic success. For similar reasons, we should all be jealous of our character,—not as a point of mere touchy selfish honour, but from the thought of the degree to which an unblemished reputation, or the contrary, bears on the glory of the Redeemer, and the salvation of souls. In this respect, it is incomparably more precious than “thousands of gold and silver.”

*Thirdly*, I may further add, the “good name” *lasts longest*. The wealth of the rich man is often coveted even while he lives. When he dies, he leaves it for ever; and, if this has been his only or his chief recommendation and attraction, he is speedily forgotten, or remembered only with contempt. But “the memory of the just is blessed.” It is embalmed in blessing. It is kept in affectionate reverence in the hearts of kindred and friends, of the church of God, and of society. And in “the day of the Lord,” when the worthlessness of all distinctions of mere condition shall be made apparent—when all the “silver and gold” in the universe would not avail to bribe away the sentence of death—the Lord shall acknowledge those who have borne the character of holy practical consistency in the faith and profession of

His name. Then, CHARACTER WILL BE EVERY THING, CONDITION NOTHING. Ay; and the "good name" will be retained in heaven,—retained for ever; and the principles from which it arose, freed from all admixture of baser material, will be the springs of everlasting blessedness, when "riches," however great, and "gold and silver," however abundant, shall all have been left behind, to perish with a burning world, and be as if they had never been.

Verse 2. "The rich and poor meet together: the Lord is the maker of them all."—By the *poor* are here to be understood, not only the needy, the indigent, the dependent, but the inferior classes generally:—"the rich and poor" meaning the highest and the lowest, with all the intermediate grades. They "*meet together*:"—

1. *In society*.—Variety of condition arises naturally and necessarily from the operation of many causes:—from diversity in character and disposition, in turn of mind, in amount of ability and diligence; and from the endless variety of providential arrangements, so frequently above all human foresight or control. Every attempt to prevent this diversity is vain. "The rich and poor" are mutually dependent on each other. The rich could not do without the poor, any more than the poor without the rich. The comparison by which the apostle illustrates the reciprocal dependence of the members of the church on one another, may be applied to civil society—"The eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you," 1 Cor. xii. 21. This ought to suppress, on the one side all emotions of supercilious scorn, and on the other, every rising of envy. Let "the rich and poor" feel their mutual dependence, and treat each other accordingly.

2. *In the church*.—There, in as far as the communion of saints is concerned, there is perfect equality. It is true, and an important truth, that union and communion in the church does not interfere with, or set aside, the distinctions of civil society, or the obvious and necessary proprieties thence arising in the social intercourse of life. But there is *one gospel* for all. All meet as *sinners* in a common con-

demnation; and all meet *as saved sinners*, on a common ground of acceptance. All are, in common, debtors to the same mercy, through the same atonement; all are renewed by the same Spirit; all supplied from the same fulness; all children of the same Father; all heirs of the same inheritance,—“heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.” Yes, *all*—the poorest as well as the richest. “There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all,” Eph. iv. 4—6.

3. *In the grave*.—Ah! here the equality—the humbling equality is complete. “The small and the great are there.” All alike are subject to the stroke of death, for all have sinned. On all, the stroke of death produces the very same effects,—the cessation of all vital sensibility, and active energy—the same cold, and the same corruption: “the worms are spread under them, and the worms cover them.” Their funeral obsequies are widely different; but in the grave they meet, in the same darkness, and loneliness, and putrefaction. The worms that prey on the dead make no distinction between the prince and the beggar.

4. *At the judgment-seat; on either hand of the Judge; and on either side of the impassable gulf—in heaven or in hell*.—The supreme Judge will himself assign them their stations at His tribunal. When He separates the assembled millions of mankind one from another, and places the one class on his right hand, and the other on his left, “the rich and poor” will be blended indiscriminately; and it will be to assemblies of all ranks and conditions of men, that the welcome on the one hand and the banishment on the other—“Come ye blessed,” and “Depart ye cursed,” shall be addressed; and heaven and hell alike shall for ever be peopled by both. To all, the principles of the judgment shall be equally and impartially applied:—*condition* in the present world being only regarded in as far as it contributed to augment or to diminish the measure of guilt. “There is no respect of persons with God.”

This idea of ultimate *impartiality* is what is chiefly suggested by the latter part of the verse—"The Lord is the Maker of them all." He is so *by creation*. They alike owe to Him their being, and owe to Him every moment the maintenance of that being—the rich man and the honourable, equally with the poorest and the meanest on earth. Where is the monarch on the throne that, more than the lowest of his subjects, can draw a breath independently of God?—And they have the Lord alike for their Maker by *providential allotment*. The same Lord makes them what they are; and could at His pleasure reverse their conditions, making the rich the poor, and the poor the rich.—The Lord being "the Maker of them all" implies also the equal distance of all, as alike His creatures, from their common Creator and Governor. The distance is the same. In both it is infinite. When God is the object of common comparison, the distance between the highest and the lowest of mankind measures not a hair's-breadth; it is annihilated. All the distinctions of which men make so much, sink into nothing before his infinite Majesty. Both are alike dependent; and both are alike responsible. And when we look forward to death, to judgment, to eternity—O how trifling are the points of difference, compared with the points of agreement!

Verse 3. "A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished."—*Prudence* is a contraction of *providence*; and *providence* literally means *foresight*,—*seeing before*,—*looking forward*. Such, you perceive, is precisely its import in this verse:—"The prudent man *foreseeth* the evil, and hideth himself." It is true that man is not endowed with *prescience*. He has *memory*, by which he retains, though even that very imperfectly, the remembrance of the past; but of the future he can know nothing with certainty. The events of the future are beyond his vision. Hence it is that prophecy comes among the evidences of inspiration, or divine commission. When Jehovah challenges the gods of the heathen to produce evidence of their pretensions to divinity, He says, "Let them show us *things to come*." Prophecy is a *miracle*—a

miracle of knowledge. When a prediction is delivered in proof of an accompanying testimony or message, the subsequent fulfilment of the prediction is satisfactory evidence of its having indeed come from God; for "no man could *know* such things, unless God were with him." But, although man has not prescience, he may often sagaciously forecast the future. By comparing the operation of circumstances in former times similar to those which exist now,—by observing the tempers and dispositions of the persons on whom these circumstances exert their influence,—and by considering the probability with which certain events will lead to certain other events,—a man may form, in many cases, a very shrewd anticipation of what is to come. As we learn to discern the "signs of the sky," we may learn also to interpret "the signs of the times,"—and that, both as to what is private and what is public. A large amount of what we are accustomed to understand by *prudence*, consists in thus forecasting the future,—anticipating evils ere they arrive, and so making provision for avoiding them, or, if they are such as cannot entirely be shunned, for meeting them to the best advantage,—so as to mitigate at least their pernicious consequences. To the "prudent man" who thus "foresees the evil and hides himself,"—as the skilful mariner, who discerns symptoms of a coming storm which the inexperienced dream not of, and betakes himself to whatever harbour is within his reach, ere the tempest gather and burst upon the deep;—to this man stands in contrast "the *simple*, who passes on and is punished." The word "*punished*" seems here to mean, not judicial *infliction*, but simply suffering the injury and damage, whether in person or in property, which is the natural result of imprudence, of want of foresight and forethought. As when two men are on a road together, where there is danger approaching, the one, looking before him, sees it coming, and turns aside till it is past, while the other, entirely heedless, perceives not its approach, and, before he is aware, meets it, and suffers:—or, as when two travellers are passing through a country that abounds with wild beasts,—one of them, acquainted with the danger, knowing the haunts and the ways

of the different animals, has all his eyes about him, is ever on the look-out, before and on either side, avoiding this course and choosing that, moving cautiously and treading softly,—while the other, ignorant of the danger and of the precautions necessary to safety, goes forward heedlessly, and falls an immediate victim to his rashness,—so is it with “*the prudent*” and “*the simple*” in the journey of life.

Not that prudence never fails of its end. It does. There is a *Providence* that is above human *prudence*: and often it happens, that that Providence orders events in ways that are quite in contrariety to the conjectures of the most sagacious foresight. All sayings like the one before us are necessarily of a *general* character.

Let us apply the maxim, as it is justly and strongly capable of being applied to spiritual and eternal interests. These interests are, in the Bible, actually reduced to a simple question of *prudence*,—a question of profit and loss.\* Well were it could we prevail on men to take up the matter in this light—to bring to a fair calculation the concerns of the soul and of the body, of time and of eternity! Well were it could we get them but to apply to these one-tenth part of the earnestness with which they set about taking stock, and bringing their books to a balance, that they may have a correct estimate of the true state of their business,—of the prosperity or the declension of their mercantile affairs! O the *imprudence*,—the wanton, criminal, self-destroying *imprudence* of leaving your accounts with God unexamined and unsettled!—in allowing the debit side of those accounts to run up, day after day, to a perpetually augmenting amount, while, on the credit side, you have nothing!—literally *nothing*!—all debt, and nothing to pay! Will you venture to leave your prospects for eternity in so ruinous a position? Know you not, that there is no stock from which your debts can be discharged but “the unsearchable riches of Christ!”—and will you refuse to avail yourselves of that stock, though it is set open to you

\* Matt. xvi. 26.

for the purpose, and to allow settling-time to come on, with nothing whatever to meet it? In other words, there is nothing that can cancel the charges of guilt against you in the book of God's remembrance, but an interest in the blood and righteousness of the one Mediator;—and will you remain without that interest, and allow death and judgment to find you with all your guilt upon your head, through your rejection or neglect of the atonement?—to find you without a justifying righteousness, because you slight and disregard that which has been provided for you? O why will you “pass on and be punished,” when you have the means of deliverance at hand,—the means of reconciliation and security?

Verse 4. “By humility, and the fear of the Lord, are riches, honour, and life.”\*—“*Humility*” and “*the fear of the Lord*” are naturally associated. They are indeed inseparable. There can be no true humility without the fear of God, nor any true fear of God without humility.† Lowliness of spirit is an indispensable characteristic of a religious life. It is in the valley of humiliation that the sinner first meets with God, and comes into a state of reconciliation with Him. It is with “a broken and a contrite heart” that he receives the mercy of the cross; and the spirit of humble self-renunciation abides with him all his future days. The spirit of pride cannot dwell in the same heart with “the fear of the Lord.” And we have here afresh the *lesson* so repeatedly before us, that *the tendency* of “humility and the fear of the Lord” is to “riches, honour, and life”—to bring respect and wealth, and to render the present life a life of happiness; while securing the riches of divine grace, the honour that cometh from God, and a life of eternal blessedness hereafter.

Verse 5. “Thorns and snares are in the way of the froward; he that doth keep his soul shall be far from them.” There seems, in this verse, to be an intended antithesis with the fourth. “The froward” stand in contrast with the “humble fearers of the Lord,”—and “thorns and snares”

\* Comp. chap. iii. 5—10.

† This is strongly indicated in the Hebrew, where there is no *and*: humility,—the fear of Jehovah. The two are in *opposition*.



with “riches, honour, and life.” The characters are opposite, and so are the effects.

The man who makes his way through a thicket of “*thorns*” is vexed, fretted, and wounded; and when there are “*snares*” besides, by which he is rendered insecure at every step, whether his foot may not be taken unawares, and even the troublesome progress he is making be thus arrested, great is the addition to his distress and perplexity. What a strong representation does this figure contain of the entanglements, difficulties, hazards, and miseries of “*the froward*”—the unprincipled and ungodly! There is no path clear, but the path of straightforward, single-eyed integrity. “*He that doth keep his soul shall be far from them*”—far, that is, from “*the froward*.” Whether we render the original word *soul* or *life*; it is equally true, that the further from such the better. He that regards the real happiness of his *life*, and he that regards the welfare of his *soul*, will study to keep aloof from their society.

Verse 6. “Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” This is a most important maxim—to parents and to guardians especially. The first observation we have to make upon it is, that the “*training*” spoken of must be considered as including all the parts of a truly religious education. The words are often quoted very much at random, and with hardly any definite meaning whatever. But you must not forget, *where they occur*. It is *in the word of God*. In all consistency, therefore, we must understand “training in the way he should go,” as signifying training in the way *which the Bible points out*,—bringing up according to the principles and the practice which it prescribes. With no other kind of training can we suppose the God who gives the book to connect any promise. And I cannot bring myself to think that Solomon here means no more than what may be expected to arise from the nature of the thing; for, though even in that view of the words, there is a certain amount of truth in them,—the promise of God’s covenant to the truly faithful training of children must surely be taken into the account.

The various branches of godly training may be thus enumerated:—1. Instruction in right principles,—the principles of God's word:—2. The inculcation of right practice,—the practice of God's will:—3. Salutary admonition, restraint, and correction:—4. The careful avoidance of exposure to evil company and evil example:—5. The exhibition before them of a good example in ourselves:—6. Constant, believing, persevering prayer. These are all necessary: and they are all connected with one another. The first must be accompanied with the second, and the second must be founded in the first; doctrine carried out to duty, and duty based in doctrine. The third and fourth neglected will render unavailing the first and second; for what will instruction in either doctrine or duty do, unless there be the avoidance of exposure to evil communications, and the admonition, restraint, and correction, necessary to show you are in earnest? What will food and medicine do, if there is no care to preserve from the infection of deadly maladies? The fifth—our own example—not attended to, will destroy the effect of all the preceding four. For what, in general, can avail mere talking to children, nay even correcting them, and warning them to keep away from evil companions,—if, with all this, our own conduct is in contravention of the whole, and, instead of recommending our instructions, exposing them to scorn, and when the rod is applied, giving them occasion to say, in their hearts if not with their lips—“Thou that judgest doest the same things?” And then, the omission of *prayer* will deprive all the rest together of their efficacy. When a child is early, carefully, piously, affectionately, and perseveringly, instructed, admonished, restrained, corrected—drawn and won with all tenderness, from evil to good, from the world to God,—inured to submission and diligence, and truth and integrity, and self-control,—an example set before him in harmony with all he is taught,—and all means, along with the subject of them, earnestly and constantly commended to God for His blessing;—if a child is *thus* “trained in the way that he should go,”—“*when he is old he will not depart from it.*”

The language is strong. It is *so* strong, that one is almost afraid to qualify it; inasmuch as professedly Christian parents are so sadly prone to lay hold on any qualification of the words, and to make a pillow of it on which they set their consciences to sleep. At the same time, I cannot regard them as containing an absolute assurance that in every individual instance in which the means are faithfully used, the result will infallibly be as here stated. There are two extremes. That which has just been mentioned is one of them; but by far the least pernicious of the two. Indeed, as I have said, I almost shrink from calling it an extreme; for it is certainly much more desirable that parents, in cases where there has been a failure, should be led to distrust of *themselves* than to distrust of *God*; to examine well whether there has not been something wanting,—something they have omitted, or something they have done wrong; some deficiency, or some error, in their instruction, their correction, their vigilance, their example, or their prayers; whether they may not have “done what they ought not to have done, or failed to do what they ought to have done;” or whether, in the entire system of training there has been that decided precedence given to their spiritual interests which there ought to have been; or that tender and winning affection and earnestness infused into the whole *manner* of spiritual tuition which there ought to have been; or that fervour and that faith in prayer that there ought to have been:—better that they should be led to such inquiry, and to such self-jealousy, than that by any modifying of the words, they should be tempted to take matters easy, and to allow the failure to lie lightly upon their consciences. Still, however, the verse may be interpreted on the same principle; as expressing strongly the *tendency* of early instruction,—what may naturally and reasonably be expected from it, as its appropriate result. Some, it is true, have gone to an absurd extreme,—as contrary to the Bible as it is to fact, in affirming the *omnipotence* of education,—so that anything whatever which you may determine to make of a child *may* be made of it—good, bad, or indifferent, and the first as easily

and as surely as the others. While this is altogether wild and presumptuous, still there must be admitted to be not a little truth in the common lines—

“’Tis education forms the infant mind;  
Just as the twig is bent, the tree ’s inclined.”

And assuredly, we ought to be *as* assiduous in “bringing up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord,” *as if* all depended upon our own efforts;—while we look, at the same time, for that divine aid and that divine influence, without which our labour will be in vain.

But if that which I have mentioned *be* an extreme, it is, as has been already said, incomparably less injurious than the other: namely, that of lulling the conscience to repose on the incessantly reiterated sentiment of the *freedom and sovereignty of grace*. When their children “rise up a seed of evil-doers,” they are grieved no doubt; but they shake their heads and say—with a great deal more of self-complacency than of self-reproach, Ah! you see, we cannot command grace:—grace is free; God has “mercy on whom he *will* have mercy;” we have done what we could; but God has not seen meet to give the blessing. And it is wonderful how very easy reflections like these make them; when, if matters were duly and scripturally examined, the saying “*we have done what we could*” might be found far short of truth,—both as to the duty itself and the manner of it. There are doctrines which have truth, Divine truth, in them, but of which particular uses are no better than *cant*. This is one of them. This continual reference, with a long-faced seriousness, to the sovereign freedom of grace, is nothing better than the cant of orthodoxy, to apologize for the neglect of duty. The God of the covenant has given ample encouragement to his people, in the promises of that covenant, to bring up their children for Him. But they are connected with commanded duty,—and dependent upon the due discharge of it. Let parents *set their hearts* on the *salvation* of their children; let this be first and last and midst in their instruction, in their prayers, in their whole general training,

and in their inquiries and their selection as to their children's settlement in life,—a matter in which Christian parents too often forget themselves, looking too much a great deal, both as to business and as to marriage connexions, to *this* world, —and so contradict all their previous professions, and prayers, and efforts, and do what they can to thwart and frustrate all: —and if there be, in any case, a failure, let it lead to self-suspicion, self-examination, inquiry into the details of the particular case, searching of heart, and prayer. They will then, and then only, have “delivered their own souls.”\*

\* The expression in the verse thus commented upon, *in the way he should go*, in the Hebrew is, literally, *his way*; and Stuart remarks—“It means *the bent of his mind or inclinations*, the capacity which he has to pursue this occupation or that. The Hebrew cannot be made to mean more than that the child should be educated for usefulness, in such a way as the bent of his genius indicates that he ought to be trained.” The reader must form his own judgment of this view.

## LECTURE LXIX.

PROV. XXII. 7—16.

“The rich ruleth over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender. He that soweth iniquity shall reap vanity; and the rod of his anger shall fail. He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed; for he giveth of his bread to the poor. Cast out the scorner, and contention shall go out; yea, strife and reproach shall cease. He that loveth pureness of heart, for the grace of his lips the king shall be his friend. The eyes of the Lord preserve knowledge; and he overthroweth the words of the transgressor. The slothful man saith, There is a lion without, I shall be slain in the streets. The mouth of strange women is a deep pit: he that is abhorred of the Lord shall fall therein. Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him. He that oppresseth the poor to increase his riches, and he that giveth to the rich shall surely come to want.”

THE effect of *wealth* has ever been to impart *influence* and *power*. Through the corruption of our nature, it is often possessed in a degree very disproportionate to the real worth of the owner; and, through the same corruption, the power arising from it is sadly abused. The rich assuming self-sufficient haughtiness, domineer over the poor, and make them feel their inferiority, taking advantage of their dependence to trample upon them,—to demand of them what is unreasonable, and even what is sinful; thus rendering their dependence “a temptation and a snare,” and extorting improper compliances, for their own convenience and advantage.

O let it not be supposed, that it is here held out as *a motive* to the pursuit and acquisition of riches, that you may thus “lord it” over the needy, and have a host of inferiors at your command. No. But it is a motive and stimulus to aim at an honest and honourable independence,

that you may not be subjected to such degradation, nor be exposed to the many temptations that arise out of it. Men naturally like to sway a golden sceptre over *others*; but it is neither in nature nor in grace to like to have it swayed over *themselves*.

“*The borrower is servant to the lender*” expresses a sentiment the same in kind. The man who lends lays the borrower under an obligation; and he is apt to feel his superiority, and to take advantage of it. He has “the borrower” under him. He asserts his claim upon him. He has it ever in his power to annoy him; and that he may make use of him for his own purposes, he may prolong the loan, and renew his bill. Having him by this means at his mercy, he contrives to keep him his humble servant. The precept—“*Owe no man anything, but to love one another,*” may, doubtless, be interpreted with a literality which would render it an impossibility. This much, however, we may surely say with truth, that *the more literally it can be kept the better*. Adhere as strictly to the letter as you can. Maintain then an honourable freedom. Cherish the spirit of independence. Prefer being your own master to bringing yourselves under obligation and subjection. Study, as far as possible, to have it to say—that no man holds against you any undischarged obligation.

Verse 8. “He that soweth iniquity shall reap vanity; and the rod of his anger shall fail.”—In nature, the crop corresponds to the seed; and, as formerly noticed, the figure is not seldom, in Scripture, applied to the final results (and sometimes even to the *present*,) of different courses of moral conduct. In the divine administration, as in the vegetable world, evil produces evil, and good good:—“They that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same,” Job iv. 8. Be it observed here, that these words were *not true* in the precise sense and according to the purpose of him who used them. *He* meant, that invariably the providential dealings of God corresponded with men’s characters; so that he inferred, from the very fact of Job’s sufferings, that he *must* have been guilty of flagrant secret sins. He saw him reap-

ing suffering, and he concluded that he must have "sowed iniquity." This was false and cruel. But still, when the words are taken with reference to the ultimate issues of human conduct, they contain a most important truth.

To "reap *vanity*" is to reap nothing that is substantial or permanently profitable. The man who "sows iniquity" may for the time, perhaps, obtain the advantage he seeks; but it will prove all worthless in the end. "The harvest shall be a heap, in the day of grief and of desperate sorrow." And this leads me to remark, that the word translated here *vanity* has also, and as properly, the sense of *affliction, grief, misery*. In the Vulgate it is rendered by the Latin word for *mischiefs*; in the Septuagint Greek the rendering is much the same; as it is also in other versions. From the latter part of the verse, it is likely that there is some special reference to the "iniquity" of oppression,—of the violence and wrong produced by haughty superiority and power:—"the rod of his anger shall fail." The rod by which he oppressed and smote the poor, for his own selfish ends—that rod "shall fail." Death shall wrest it from his hands. God shall break it in pieces; and his tyranny and iniquity shall leave him nothing but shame, remorse, and the fruits of divine vengeance.

Verse 9. "He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed; for he giveth of his bread to the poor."—In the Hebrew the expression is—"He that is *good of eye*." The opposite phrase—"an *evil eye*"—is frequent in Scripture, and is used in various senses. It is applied, for example, in a general way, to *duplicity of principle*; in which sense it stands opposed to what our Lord calls "having *the eye single*."\* It is applied also to a *perverted state of the affections* toward any of their objects,—supposed of course to be indicated by the looks.† It is further used for *envy*;‡ and further still for a principle closely allied to envy—*covetousness*—eagerly looking at the object desired, and grudging at every expenditure of it.§

\* Luke xi. 34.

† Dent. xxviii. 54, 56.

‡ Matt. xx. 15: Mark vii. 22: where it is distinguished from covetousness.

§ Prov. xxiii. 6; xxviii. 22: Dent. xv. 9.



This meaning is illustrated by the use of the corresponding expression, in the verse before us,—“*a good eye.*” It means the eye of compassionate and generous tenderness,—that looks, with a desire to relieve, on the wants and woes of others, melting in sympathy over their sufferings; and that, at the same time, does not merely weep—shedding unavailing tears,—but, affecting the heart, opens the hand—“for he giveth of his bread to the poor.” Perhaps the expression—“he giveth *of his bread* to the poor,” may mean, that he is ready even to share his own provision with them; not merely to give a small portion of his superfluities, but to stint himself for their supply. And this is the spirit of true charity. “He shall be *blessed*.”—blessed of men; and blessed of God.

Verse 10. “Cast out the scorner, and contention shall go out; yea, strife and reproach shall cease.”—By “*the scorner*,” in various occurrences of the designation in this Book, is meant the profane and impious scoffer at religion,—the “*mock*er, whose bands shall be made strong.” Here it seems to mean the man of contemptuous and sneering insolence,—of sarcasm and banter,—of sly and keen insinuation,—of malicious “jibes and jests and irony;” the man who is ever holding up others to ridicule or to suspicion; who vents his spleen against all in succession that come in his way, and whom it suits a present selfish or silly purpose to turn the laugh against, and to make the butt of satire and lampoon.

The sayings and doings of such a character are the source of endless heartburnings, jealousies, and contentions. “The scorner” may be mixed up with these as a party,—himself the object of resentment and retaliation; or they may be stirred up by his agency among others. Men of this stamp are the very pests of social life, in families, in neighbourhoods, in the circles of acquaintance and friendship. They are such characters as Paul may be supposed to have had in his eye, when, in inculcating peace, he threw in his conditional *if*—his modifying clause—“*If it be possible*, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.” There

is really no living in peace with them. There is no agreement, no quietness, no comfort, no enjoyment, till you get rid of them. They are the blowers of the fires of strife. Their words are seeds of malice. Their very looks set friends at variance. Their jests are dictated by the gall of ill-nature, at which the very laugh is meant to engender spite and foment discord. They are cankerworms in the flowers and fruits of social life.

There are persons who sometimes make their appearance in churches,—persons who are full of spiritual pride and self-consequence,—“wise in their own conceits”—“O how lofty are their eyes, and their eyelids are lifted up!”—“no doubt they are the people, and wisdom shall die with them!” They “trust in themselves that they are *right*, and despise others.” They are supercilious “*scorners*” of all opinions but their own; and they treat all others with the sneer of self-sufficient derision. They thus produce “contention, strife, and reproach”—envies, resentments, charges and recriminations, uncharitable conjectures and surmises, schisms and divisions, wherever they go. And from church to church sometimes they *do* go,—carrying with them their tinder-box and their steel:—and woe to each in succession! Others are disposed to be at peace, and would live in it, in comfort and prosperity, if these strife-kindlers would but allow them. What, then, is the remedy, when such characters arise, and are found to be incorrigible? Here we have it:—“*Cast out the scorner, and contention shall go out; yea, strife and reproach shall cease.*” He shows a sad absence of the leading graces of the Christian character, and a consequent unfitness for a place amongst the children of God. His spirit is the very opposite of what is engendered by the influence of the gospel; and the prevalence of it is utterly destructive of all the ends of Christian fellowship. Humility and love, with their happy results, peace and harmony, are essential to the spiritual prosperity and growth of the churches of Christ. And surely that which is the very reverse of the example of the Master, and of what his Holy Spirit, when he dwells in the soul, produces, and which

essentially and flagrantly mars and frustrates the very designs of Christian communion, ought to be put away. There is no cure but "*casting out.*" Such men are the Jonahs of churches, and of the coteries of social life. As long as they are there, there will be nothing but the bluster and commotion of the storm,—"*toiling in rowing,*" incessant distress, vain exertion, and no progress. The sea cannot "*cease from its raging,*" till they are thrown overboard.

Verse 11. "He that loveth pureness of heart, for the grace of his lips the king shall be his friend."—By "*pureness of heart*" we should surely here understand, in its full extent, what is usually meant by the phrase in the word of God. It signifies *sincerity*, it is true; but it signifies that sincerity as attaching to and characterizing something more. It is the sincerity of genuine piety, of inward sanctity, of all the holy principles and affections which the heart-searching God enjoins and approves; which He loves; on which He smiles and "*lifts the light of his countenance.*"\*

He that "*loveth pureness of heart,*" is he who not only has an admiring affection for it in others, but desires it and cultivates it in himself,—using with constancy, diligence, and prayer, all the means of heart-purification. The Apostle, speaking of "*righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost,*" says, "*He that in these things serveth Christ, is acceptable to God and approved of men.*" Solomon agrees with him. "*He who loveth pureness of heart, for the grace of his lips the king shall be his friend.*"

By the "*grace of his lips*" we are to understand, not merely propriety, correctness, and elegance of address, and persuasiveness of manner, but such address as the vehicle of wise and salutary counsel,—characterized by prudence, humility, and respect. Even when there is no liking to true religion, there are some of its effects which command esteem and win affection. Humble consistency, propriety, a conduct appropriate to station, firmness of adherence to principle

\* See Psal. xxiv. 3—5; lxxiii. 1: Matt. xv. 8: and, in connexion with these, to impress the necessity of guileless sincerity, Psal. xxxiii. 1, 2: John i. 47: Psal. li. 6.

with deferential gentleness of demeanour,—the great, even kings themselves, will admire and honour. So was it in the case of Joseph; of Ezra and Nehemiah; of Mordecai; of Daniel; of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; and so has it been with others.

My brethren, let us cultivate the character, independently of every consideration of its effects to ourselves, amongst *men*. It is good in the sight of God; and that is enough. That should be our *supreme* reason for seeking it. Many, instead of reaping from it the favour of the prince, have been exposed on account of it to persecution and to death. The will of God must be our law, and the approving smile of God our reward. While we thank God for the favour He may give us in the sight of men,—we must see that we seek no friendships, whether among the greatest or the least, the highest or the lowest, by any other means whatever than the “pureness of heart” and the consistency of life here recommended. Even in regard to mere external ceremonial defilement, Daniel and his companions would not, in compliance with the wishes and for the sake of the favour of the king, pollute themselves. It would have been a transgression against their God. It would have defiled their consciences, and impaired their sense of integrity before Him:—and what would the favour of the king of Babylon have been to them, when for it they had forfeited that of the God of heaven? Never must the lips be allowed to assume a grace that is inconsistent with pureness and sanctity; or to give utterance to a single word of flattering courtesy, to which the heart does not respond—no not for the sake of the friendly regard of all the crowned heads of Europe. What Solomon says is rather an encouragement to love and cultivate “pureness of heart,” than a motive to be directly regarded, and allowed to influence us to this duty. It is only one of those indirect results which may be enjoyed as a testimony of the higher approbation of God.

Verse 12. “The eyes of the Lord preserve knowledge; and he overthroweth the words of the transgressor.” This language is susceptible of various interpretations:—

1. By some it is interpreted in immediate connexion with the preceding verse. According to this view “the eyes of the Lord *preserving knowledge*” means their being upon it at all times for its protection and safety; knowledge being thus put—the abstract for the concrete—for the persons who are under its influence; so that the words in the former part of the verse will amount, in effect, to much the same with the expression—“the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous.” Thus Dr. Lawson: \*—“When knowledge in the mind is attended by pureness in the heart and grace in the lips, they form an amiable and worthy character, which draws to it the eyes and hearts of wise men: but that is not the principal recommendation of it; for the eyes of the Lord himself preserve knowledge, and watch for good over the man whose lips and conversation are regulated by it.” † This certainly renders the *antithesis* in the verse pointed and natural:—“*but he overthroweth the words of the transgressor.*”

2. The first part of the verse has been understood of the vigilant care exercised by the Lord over *knowledge*,—that is, over the knowledge of Himself—over divine truth—over true religion in the world; of the providence of God preserving this truth, in the midst of abounding ignorance, idolatry, and infidelity under all its forms; of the successful overthrow of all opposition—all the false reasonings, the insidious sophistries, and corrupting heresies, of the unbelieving and ungodly; and the extraordinary preservation of the volume of inspired truth in such a measure of purity from age to age, amidst all the attempts to suppress and destroy it. This interpretation of the words has been illustrated by the calling of Abraham,—by the revelation given to Moses, and the commission of the “lively oracles” received by him from Jehovah, to the sacred custody of His ancient people, chosen from among the nations of the earth for the very purpose of the guardianship and preservation of “knowledge”—the knowledge of His law, of His purposes, and promises, and covenant:—and, under the New Testament dispensation, by

\* So also Stuart.

† Comp. 2 Chron. xvi. 9.

the completing of the sacred canon, and its constant preservation through such a variety of concurrent causes;—its republication, after ages of darkness, at the glorious Reformation;—its translation and circulation in so many of the languages and dialects of mankind, so that now nothing could destroy it, short of the miraculous interference of the almighty power of its divine Author. If the former part of the verse be taken in *this* sense, then the latter may be interpreted of the vanity of “all the hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against it.” Infidel writers, in the elation of their presumptuous confidence, have given utterance, at times, to predictions of the speedy overthrow of what they have stigmatized as superstition and old-wives’ fables. But their own words—not God’s, have been “overthrown,” and have been proved “great swelling words of vanity.” Shame hath covered their authors. And “knowledge”—the best, the highest, the most valuable—the knowledge of the “only true God, and of Jesus Christ whom he hath sent,” which is “life eternal,” remains in all its perfection to this hour; and never did it present a fairer and surer promise of universality and permanence:—“The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field: the grass withereth, the flower fadeth; because the spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: *but the word of our God shall stand for ever,*” Isa. xl. 6—8.

3. There is still another sense of the words,—which they *may* bear; though by some, perhaps, it may be regarded as fanciful:—“The eyes of the Lord *keep* knowledge:”—they *retain* it. What He sees, be it but for a moment, does not, as with *our* vision, pass away. It remains. We see, and, having seen, what passes from the eye passes also from the memory. Not so is it with God’s vision. The sight of His eye is no uncertain or forgetful glance. It is unerring and permanent. All that His eyes have ever seen is known as perfectly now as when it passed before them,—as when it existed or happened!—And in the exercise of

this permanent and perfect knowledge, "He overthroweth the words of the transgressors." All their evil desert remains before Him. They can neither elude His knowledge, nor bribe His justice, nor resist His power. They shall all be made to learn by fearful experience, "whose words shall stand, *His, or theirs!*"

Verse 13. "The slothful man saith, There is a lion without, I shall be slain in the streets." It is not a *common* thing for *lions* to frequent *streets*. The forest is their place. But the indolent sluggard conjures up imaginary difficulties and perils, such as would never occur to any but a morbid mind. Any excuse will do: the fancy of danger—the presence of fear. But what keeps him still, even in cases of the utmost urgency, is not cowardice; it is mere indolence. Yet would he rather incur the imputation of timid chicken-heartedness than make any exertion, than rouse himself to the slightest activity. He is ready to say, "Call me what you will—abuse me as you like—say and think of me what you please—but *let me alone.*" The verse is obviously the language of sarcastic and cutting derision; and is intended, were that possible, to put the sluggard to the blush.

Let us beware of the encroachments of this somnolent and lazy habit. In calls of duty especially,—when the good of others and the glory of God summon us to exertion, let us strive resolutely against it. Never let it, in any case, be said,—never let our own consciences have it to say,—that *indolence*—the mere indisposition to bestir ourselves, has lost us an opportunity of glorifying God or benefiting men,—our families, our friends, our neighbours, our country, or the church of God. Never let us conjure up "*lions*" that have no being save in our own fancy, and, so lay up for ourselves regrets afterwards, and stings of conscience, which seasonable exertion, then too late, might have prevented,—nay more, might have substituted for them pleasing reflections and present and anticipated enjoyment.

Verse 14. "The mouth of strange women is a deep pit: he that is abhorred of the Lord shall fall therein." For a full, affectionate, faithful, and fearful commentary on this

emphatic and appalling sentence I refer you to the early portions of this Book, formerly under our review.\* I have called the sentence before us an appalling one. Is it not? Can any words be more so? It is not so much the strong figure used—the “*deep pit*”—artfully concealed—into which the unwary passenger falls headlong ere he is aware, and perishes:—a pit this, into which a fall is more than danger, is certain death and destruction;—I refer more particularly to the latter words of the verse—“*he that is abhorred of the Lord shall fall therein!*” O my hearers—my youthful hearers especially,—this is solemn, this is terrible. It is the language of bitter experience;—of a spirit that had felt the agony of being deserted of God, and in danger of being given up to judicial and final abandonment. Solomon had fallen into this pit. He had forsaken God, and God had for the time forsaken him. And Oh! the agony of awakened conviction and felt abandonment! To what do the fearful words amount? To this: that in His righteous displeasure, there is not a heavier curse which an offended God can allow to fall upon the object of His wrath, than leaving him to be a prey to the seductive blandishments of an unprincipled woman:—that if God held any one in abhorrence, *this* would be the severest vengeance He could take on him. O! let youth hear this, and tremble! There are few vices—if indeed there be any—more sadly prevalent; and there are few—if indeed there be any—more miserably destructive of soul, body, and estate. The abhorrence and the curse of God are in the haunts, whether open or secret, of profligacy and lewdness. Wish you to have proof of your being “*abhorred of the Lord?*” Court the company of the “*strange woman.*” If not, flee from the temptation, as you would from the opening mouth of hell!

The following verse contains a statement of *fact*,—and the *duty* arising out of it. The fact stated is, that “*foolishness is bound in the heart of a child.*” By “*foolishness*” is to be understood not merely frivolity, levity, and nonsense;

\* See chap. ii. 16—19; v. 3—12.



but something greatly more deplorable,—the principles of moral evil—of spiritual corruption. This “foolishness” is “bound in the child’s heart.” It has a *firm seat*, from which it is not easily dislodged. It is *inbred*—entwined closely and intimately, and with sad universality of influence, among all the natural passions, desires, and affections of the human constitution, as well as all the powers and faculties of the mind, which are all tainted by the corrupting leaven.

“*The rod of correction shall drive it far from him.*” It is here implied that the foolishness is so “bound in the heart,” as to *need* this, among other means of expulsion. I say among others; for nothing could be more preposterous than to suppose *the rod by itself* to be meant here. It is “the rod” as accompanying, and contributing to give effect to instruction, admonition, counsel, example, and prayer.\* And in order, as we have seen, to the end being effectually answered, the nature and degree of the fault, the time, the temper, the manner, and the measure, of the correction, must all be carefully attended to. Injudicious chastisement, ill-timed, ill-tempered, ill-adapted to the case, and ill-proportioned in measure, may effectually frustrate the end in view; nay may even serve to promote its opposite, confirming, instead of expelling folly.

Verse 16. “He that oppresseth the poor to increase his riches, and he that giveth to the rich, shall surely come to want.”—How frequently, under different modifications and aspects, does the wise man introduce this subject! There are here two things which *may* and sometimes *do* go together—“oppressing the poor, to increase riches,” and—“giving to the rich.” The former is done to gratify avarice; the latter, to humour vanity. The one also furnishes the means of the other; the wealth that is obtained by the oppression of the poor, being employed in courting, by gifts and accommodations, the favour of the rich. There is something in this fitted to stamp the character with universal odium:—the idea of getting the riches that are spent in courting the

\* See chap. xiii. 24; xix. 18.

rich, at the expense of the comfort of the poor, by screwing them down, stinting them in their means of life, grinding their faces, and defrauding them of their own! Such conduct brings a *double curse*, as that in verse sixth brings a double blessing:—*first*, for his oppression of the poor, who, as we have often seen, are God's special care:—and *secondly*, for his *selfish* application of what is thus obtained. There is no principle in either, of regard to God,—either to His authority or to His glory; nor of benevolence to men. The sole object is the gratification and aggrandizement of *self*. It is *self* that oppresses the poor, and keeps from them what they *do* need; and it is *self* that curries favour with the rich, by giving to them that which they *do not* need. Of the man who acts thus, *want* shall be the doom. He shall not prosper. The curse of God will blast his acquisitions, and bring him low:—and in the end his portion shall be destitution and misery for ever.

## LECTURE LXX.

—◆—  
PROV. XXII. 17—29.

“Bow down thine ear, and hear the words of the wise, and apply thine heart unto my knowledge: for it is a pleasant thing if thou keep them within thee; they shall withal be fitted in thy lips. That thy trust may be in the Lord, I have made known to thee this day, even to thee. Have not I written to thee excellent things in counsels and knowledge; that I might make thee know the certainty of the words of truth; that thou mightest answer the words of truth to them that send unto thee? Rob not the poor, because he is poor; neither oppress the afflicted in the gate: for the Lord will plead their cause, and spoil the soul of those that spoiled them. Make no friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man thou shalt not go; lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul. Be not thou one of them that strike hands, or of them that are sureties for debts. If thou hast nothing to pay, why should he take away thy bed from under thee? Remove not the ancient landmark, which thy fathers have set. Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men.”

At this point, we enter on the *third* of the *five* parts into which, as I stated in the introductory Lecture, this Book has usually been divided. It extends from the first of these verses to the end of the twenty-fourth chapter. It is more of a connected character than the *second* part, and bears a closer resemblance to the style and manner of the *first*.

The opening words—“*Bow down thine ear, and hear*”—enjoin the attitude of earnest, eager listening;—the attitude at times to be observed in a public assembly, when anything happens to be introduced by the speaker particularly in coincidence with the likings of his audience. There is then a breathless silence; every ear is erect and forward; and where hearing is dull, every aid applied to the organ that may pre-

vent a single word of what is said being lost. But too often, alas! are to be witnessed the listless countenance, and the drowsy eye; and the ear, instead of being bent to a listening posture, is allowed, with all indifference, to catch or to miss the passing sounds, just as it may chance; and thus sounds that convey the most important and solemn truths strike upon the organ, without the mind's being conscious of the least impression. Hence, we have the further injunction—"Apply thine heart." There must be a feeling of *interest*—a *desire* to know and understand what is said. The connexion is very intimate between the state of the *dispositions* and the right exercise of the *understanding*. Simple ignorance,—ignorance that is involuntary and unavoidable—can never be culpable. The ignorance that is culpable, and that merits punitive retribution, is that which arises solely from *moral causes*.\* There is divine wisdom, divine glory, divine suitableness and consistency, in the truths of God's Word; but from the state of "*the heart*" there is a film on the eyes of the mind that renders sinners criminally, because wilfully, blind to all their excellence. When by the Holy Spirit's power this film is removed and there is once spiritual illumination and discernment,—a taste and relish of divine "knowledge" imparted,—the eager longing is inspired for a growing measure of attainment in it.

Then comes to be realized the truth of the verse which follows:—"For it is a pleasant thing if thou keep them (the words of the wise and the knowledge thence derived) within thee; they shall withal be fitted in thy lips." "*Keeping them within*" refers not to the *memory* merely, but to the *heart*. They must be treasured up there from delight in them and love to them. Like Him who is their subject, they must "*dwell in the heart* by faith." As there is no kind of knowledge that can be compared in value with the knowledge of God's truth, there is none of which the acquisition is more exqui-

\* Compare Rom. i. 28; John viii. 43 (where *hear* means *bear*): Eph. iv. 18 (where blindness means more properly *callousness* or *hardness*,—as in the margin—and as appears from the following verse—"who, being *past feeling*, &c.): and Deut. xxix. 3, 4.

sitely grateful. It introduces a “peace that passeth all understanding,”—a joy before unknown,—a “joy unspeakable and full of glory”—a joy that wakes into fresh life as, in the progress of our inquiries, new light is thrown upon any of the divine discoveries. What believer is there who has not experienced the exquisite nature of the pleasure? And what pleasure so reasonable? The philosopher may scorn it: but if the discovery of a fact, or the solution of a problem, or the establishment of a theory, in science, gives *him* satisfaction, why should not the Christian be vindicated in the delight he feels on discerning more clearly the mind of God, on points connected, not with time merely, but with eternity? Can anything be imagined more important, more full of interest than this?

The understanding and retaining of “the words of wisdom” are necessary qualifications for *the right imparting* of them. This seems, substantially, the lesson of the latter part of the verse:—“*They shall withal be fitted in thy lips:*” that is, thou shalt be able to communicate them fitly—in an appropriate, intelligent, and effective manner. In proportion as God’s word is “kept within”—in the understanding with intelligence and discrimination, in the memory with clearness and readiness, and in the heart with experience and affection—will be the degree of capability to teach others, and of probable efficiency and success.

There is another benefit that may be connected with “keeping them within.” When we have the word “hidden in our hearts,” it is the means of *progressive sanctification*. It works with a leavening influence amongst all our affections, desires and passions, purifying the whole inner man.\* And hence arises a further peculiar fitness of the words of wisdom in the lips. Most *unfitting* and incongruous are they in the lips of the ungodly. It is only when a holy life makes it manifest that they are *in the heart*, that they are appropriately “fitted in the lips.”

Verse 19. “That thy trust may be in the Lord, I have

\* Psal. cxix. 11: 1 John iii. 9.

made known to thee this day, even to thee." On this verse observe the following things:—

1. The *particularity of address*,—"to thee, even to thee." In the days of prophetic inspiration, it was no unusual thing for the servants of God to receive express commissions to individuals, in which they alone were concerned. But the whole Book of God,—the entire "word of His testimony,"—should be considered by *every one* as addressed to *him*;—as much so as if there were no other human being besides himself, and as if it had been "given by inspiration" to himself alone. There is no room for any saying, as Jehu did of old,—"*To which of all us?*" The answer would, in every case, be—*To each of you all*—to thee—to thee—to thee. Not that there is no such thing as "rightly dividing the word of truth;" not that there are no portions of it that have a special appropriateness of application to the characters and circumstances of individuals. Still, the great truths of the Word are alike to *each* and to *all*. And speedily a man may be placed in one or other of the peculiar situations to which the different portions of it are adapted! I know of nothing more important than for every individual to bring divine lessons *home to himself*. Too often, alas! we forget *personal* amidst *general* application of particular truths. We think of them as intended *for men*, and forget that they are designed *for us*. Would you then profit by what you hear?—keep in mind, that what is addressed to *an* is addressed to *each*—"to thee, even to thee."

2. Mark the emphasis on the time—"this day." We set a mark, in our minds, on days that have been rendered memorable by events of special interest. Would Noah, think you, ever forget the day of the year on which he and his family entered the ark, and when "the Lord shut him in?"—or the day on which he again stepped out of it upon the green earth, to be the second father of mankind? Would the shepherds ever forget on what night of the year the angelic messengers, amidst the light of the glory of the Lord, announced to them the divine Saviour's birth, and when "the multitude of the heavenly host," bursting on

their sight, "ascended jubilant," saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men?" Or would Cornelius ever forget the day and the hour when the angelic visitant directed him to that instruction whereby he and all his house should be saved? *You*, it is true, have many times heard the words of truth. Let me, however, remind any of you who *have* thus often heard, and who still neglect them, of the importance to you of *each day* that you enjoy the privilege. Every time you thus hear them, your eternal all depends on the reception you give to the message of God. *This day* may be important indeed, for it may be the last on which divine truth shall sound in your ears. O that it may be a day to be sacredly and joyfully remembered by every sinner now present, as the day on which he first felt its inestimable preciousness to his soul! If you thus hear, and thus improve the opportunity, the day will not be obliterated from your memory by the lapse of eternity. There is one thing of which with emphasis it may be said to each individual sinner—It is "*to thee, even to thee:*"—I mean the message of the Gospel—the message of free mercy through the divine Mediator. There is no exception; there is no difference. The Law speaks to each—"to thee, even to thee"—its sentence of condemnation. The Gospel speaks to each—"to thee, even to thee"—its offer of free, full, immediate, irrevocable, pardon on the ground of the universal atonement. To every fellow-creature we can say—An adequate atonement has been made for all; therefore *for thee*—"for thee, even for thee;" and on the ground of that atonement does divine mercy come near to thee—"to thee, even to thee"—with the offer of forgiveness, acceptance, and life. "*This day*" is the message of life again "made known" unto thee, O sinner; and there is no obstacle to thine acceptance and enjoyment of it, but what is *in thyself*;—none in God; none in Christ; none in the atonement; none in the divine offer of its virtue to mankind. "*To thee* is the word of this salvation sent;" and "now is the accepted time, now the day of salvation."

3. Mark *the design*:—"That thy trust may be in the Lord."

Can there be a design more gracious? It is connected with the sinner's present and eternal happiness. "They that know thy name," says David, "shall put their trust in thee:" then it follows—"for thou, Lord, hast never forsaken them that seek thee." No. God "keeps them by His power, through faith unto salvation." God is revealed, to be trusted in: and He is worthy of all confidence. To trust in God is to trust in His perfections, as made known in the gospel,—in His *mercy* as it there appears in union with the justice and holiness of His character and government, and in His *faithfulness* to all the "exceeding great and precious promises" of His covenant, which are "yea and amen in Christ Jesus." All may thus trust in Him. I say to each hearer—"To thee, even to *thee*" is God in Christ made known, that *thou* mayest trust in Him. This trust arises from the knowledge of him as in Christ the God of salvation. Mark the testimony—"Who verily was fore-ordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; *that your faith and hope might be in God,*" 1 Pet. i. 20, 21. A blessing is ever represented as accompanying and flowing from it; while the language dictated by it is that of unmoved tranquillity, and fearless joy—"O Lord, I will praise thee: though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me. Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation," Isa. xii. 1, 2.

Verses 20, 21. "Have not I written to thee excellent things in counsels and knowledge; that I might make thee know the certainty of the words of truth; that thou mightest answer the words of truth to them that send unto thee."—There are differences among critics and translators about the exact meaning of the original word translated, in the former of these verses, "*excellent things.*" Yet I know not that it could be altered for the better. In all the views given of it there is still the idea, more plain or more covert, of superiority or excellence. If, with the Vulgate and Septuagint,



we take up the sense "*thrice repeated*,"\*—why are things thus repeated but for their excellence? If with the French translation, we render—"things relating to rulers or governors," this, when analysed, may yield the meaning of *princely* or *royal* things,—which is but a figurative way of expressing their transcendent superiority. And even the simple rendering—*rules* or *directions* (Parkhurst) must be taken, according to the etymology of the term, as implying their having in them a kind of royal authority or commanding excellence.†

The discoveries of the Bible—its truths and precepts alike, are in the highest sense "excellent things." The word of God bears, like His works, the impress of His name and character. There is in it a self-evidencing power. It is its own witness. It meets all our consciousnesses, and is adapted to all our felt exigencies; and, though there are many things in it which our reason could never have *discovered*, yet they are such as, when discovered, are none of them contrary to reason, although above it: and those that are within the compass of our understanding, recommend themselves to all our convictions, as worthy of the divine Being, and suited to us. There is impressed upon it throughout infallible proof of its divine original,—in its infinite superiority to all that unassisted human effort had ever been able to discover of God and of divine things. All is the harmony of perfect excellence. In this very Book of Proverbs—what a fund of practical wisdom!—all holy—all divine; all recognizing man's relation to God, as every system of virtue ought to do; all founded in "*the fear of the Lord*" as "*the beginning of wisdom!*" And this divine "*excellence*" of the contents of the Sacred Volume is one of the evidences by which our faith in its *certainty* may reasonably be confirmed:—"that I might make thee know *the certainty* of the words of truth"

\* This rendering is based on a different reading of the Hebrew.

† Stuart renders (perhaps rightly) "Have I not written to thee *heretofore*," &c.; and remarks that the Hebrew word שלשום, while meaning "literally *the day before yesterday*, has also a more general meaning, viz. *formerly, in time past*;" and considers Solomon as alluding to "the previous portions of this Book."

According to what has just been said, the more we know *what the word of God is*,—the more we study it, and become acquainted with its contents, and the more, in consequence, we experience of its holy power, and of the happiness arising from conformity to its dictates,—the greater will be our *assurance of its truth*. We shall have “the witness in ourselves” of its divinity,—the *experimental* evidence of its heavenly origin,—the proof of its being *from* God in its tendency *to* God—in its influence, (according to the degree in which it is prized, and felt, and followed, its spirit imbibed and its principles obeyed,)—over human character, in assimilating man to his Maker, in the beauty of holiness. There is a *certainty* as to *facts*, which rests upon the nature and amount of the testimony by which they are affirmed.\* But besides this, and besides all the variety and force of *external* proof of the genuineness, authenticity, and inspiration of the Sacred Volume, there is, in its doctrinal discoveries and holy precepts, and in the adaptation of its provisions to the state and the need of man, an *internal* evidence;—and there is, in the realized efficacy of the doctrine here taught, in changing the heart and bringing the whole man under the power of new principles and new affections,—all working out a holy and a happy life,—an *experimental* evidence of its truth and divinity not less valuable and satisfactory, than they are, in their nature, in perfect harmony with the soundest reason. O! it is a blessed thing, to perceive clearly the one, and to possess largely the other!—a blessed thing *thus* to “know the *certainty* of the words of truth.” It is thus that we “have peace with God,” and that we “go on our way rejoicing.”

And from an intimate and experimental acquaintance with revealed truth arises another advantage, here mentioned by Solomon—“that thou mightest answer the words of truth to them that send unto thee.” “Them that *send unto thee*,” is most naturally explained—them that *consult* thee, or apply to thee for instruction. This may be the case,

\* See Luke i. 1—4.

not with public teachers alone, but with private Christians. And, as we have already seen, on verse 18th, (of which the sentiment is similar,) it is a clear, familiar, discriminative, and experimental acquaintance with the contents of the inspired volume, that imparts fitness for this important duty. A professed believer in the Bible cannot but feel embarrassed and awkward, when inquiries are made by any desirous of instruction in its great truths, and they are constrained from the want of this, to “send them away empty.” See then, beloved, that *you* seek to make yourselves more and more intelligently and extensively familiar with the varieties of divine communication in the Sacred Scriptures,—that you may be able to “instruct the ignorant and them that are out of the way,” and “ready always to give an answer, with meekness and fear, to every one that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you.”

Verses 22, 23. “Rob not the poor, because he is poor; neither oppress the afflicted in the gate: for the Lord will plead their cause, and spoil the soul of those that spoiled them.”—O the condescending kindness of God—the God of love, to *the poor!* to those who are most in danger of being overlooked and despised. Old and New Testaments are full of the repetitions of it. Frequently have we had the subject before us. We do not—we dare not *pass* it. Where there is repetition in the Word of God, it is right that there should be repetition on the part of those who teach it;—that its lessons may be impressed the more deeply, and never allowed to slip out of mind. In the midst of the sameness too, there is *variety*.—“*Robbery*” of the poor may be practised *directly* or *indirectly*;—by *taking* from him, or by *keeping* from him; or by making his poverty a temptation to him to part with what he ought to retain. Few may think of “robbing the poor” in the *first* of these ways. Robbers generally seek better game. Yet even the little of the poor does not always escape the hand of covetous rapacity. But many there are, who “rob the poor” in the *second* of the ways mentioned. They deprive the poor of their due—keeping back from them what they are in fairness

entitled to, and taking advantage of their urgent necessities to effect this; screwing them down to the very least for which, by the dread of starvation, they can be prevailed upon to work. And not seldom too has the poor been tempted to surrender his rights and privileges by being made to feel, for the purpose of extorting it from him, his helpless, unprotected, friendless condition. This has been done by private extortion; and it has been done, as Solomon here hints, "*in the gate*"—that is, by an undue advantage taken of the law, against the man who has no means of self-defence, and who has thus cruelty and unrighteousness added to his affliction. Every way in which the poor is robbed "*because he is poor*,"—that is, in which advantage is taken of his indigent and dependent condition,—provokes the indignation of Heaven: "For the Lord will plead their cause, and spoil the soul of those that spoiled them." We are here reminded, that the poor are *not* friendless. The words "*will plead their cause*" have an immediate reference to *judicial* proceedings, alluded to in the previous phrase—"*in the gate*"—the place of such proceedings. At human tribunals, we sometimes find disinterested and benevolent counsel, who step forward to the protection of the poor, and gratuitously offer themselves to "*plead their cause*." JEHOVAH HIMSELF is the counsel of the poor. *He* "will plead their cause." He will interpose by his providence for their protection; or if here they are allowed to suffer, He will not permit their oppressors to pass with impunity, when He rises up to final judgment. He will show himself their friend and patron by avenging them on their adversaries. He will "*spoil the soul of those that spoiled them*."

Verses 24, 25. "Make no friendship with an angry man; and with a furious man thou shalt not go; lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul." In this wise and prudent admonition, it is evident, that by "*friendship*" is to be understood intimacy,—the alliance of mutual trust and confidence, and unbosoming familiarity and interchange of mind and heart; and by "*an angry man*," a man of hot, fiery, passionate temperament.

For the comfort of personal and domestic life, there are few things more important than looking carefully to the tempers of those whom we choose as intimates, either with ourselves, or at our firesides, in the circle of family privacy and love. Whatever other qualifications a man may have that are fitted to make his society agreeable and tempt us to court it,—they may be many and attractive,—*temper* may more than neutralize the whole. Nothing can be more painful than a state of incessant apprehension of waking slumbering fires,—kindling to sudden ignition some latent combustibles; so that, instead of unreserved and open freedom, which is the very life and soul of “friendship,” every word must be carefully weighed ere it is uttered, lest it should prove a spark, and cause an explosion. It is insufferably irksome, to be ever under such restraint, and ever in the midst of such risks of touching the secret springs of hasty passion. And the consequences are mischievous. Not only will the intimacy of such men, men who are thus choleric and quarrelsome, endanger our getting involved in numberless factions and feuds with themselves, and, what is worse, with others through their means,—so that we shall not be able, how desirous soever we may be, to live in peace,—that first and best of blessings in social life to a good man:—but another and a greater hazard is mentioned in the latter verse—“*lest thou learn his ways.*” It may seem strange that we should be supposed in danger of learning what we feel to be so very disagreeable. And yet we may. As already hinted, a passionate man may have interesting and attractive qualities otherwise. Now, in proportion as we either admire or love him for these, will be the hazard of our thinking the less evil of his one defect, and trying to palliate and to smile at it. And there is no little truth in the saying, that we either *are* like our friends and intimates, or *will soon be*. But more than this. The sudden and often unreasonable heats of the passionate man are ever apt to fret and irritate our spirits, and thus to form a habit of resemblance by the very reaction upon ourselves of his hot and hasty temper. And thus, from being

good-natured and agreeable, we may gradually become very much the reverse.

This is “a *snare to the soul*.” It not only affects the comfort and tranquillity of our own minds and our social enjoyment—but our spiritual interests. Angry passions “war against the soul.” They are inconsistent with the principles of the truth of God, and with the precepts and example of our divine Master—and consequently with the evidence of true godliness, and of our relation to Christ as his subjects, and to God as his children. “The fruit of the Spirit is Love.”

Verses 26, 27. “Be not thou one of them that strike hands, or of them that are sureties for debts. If thou hast nothing to pay, why should he take away thy bed from under thee.” On all subjects, we require “line upon line, and precept upon precept, here a little, and there a little.”—You may think the subject in these verses is one on which we hardly require much urgency:—that there is enough in general of self-love in the heart to prevent any great excess of readiness in “*striking hands and becoming sureties for debts*.” But there are some dispositions that are generous and obliging; and there are those who are young and unexperienced in the ways of the world, who do stand in need of having such cautions repeated and urged.\*

The language evidently implies, not a universal prohibition of suretiship, as of a thing wrong in itself and under whatever circumstances, but an advice and admonition to special caution and circumspection. There may, as I have before said, be cases in which it is more than justifiable,—in which every claim of necessity and mercy renders it an imperative duty. But still, we are not entitled, for the sake of one, to expose others to risk. We are not entitled to overlook and disregard either the risks and rights of other creditors, or the interests of a dependent family.

The reason too assigned here for the caution shows us, that in our dealings with others, a prudent regard to our own

\* See on this subject chap. vi. 1—5; xi. 15; xvii. 18.

interests is a perfectly legitimate motive;—“*if thou hast nothing to pay*”—that is, if, on the failure of the party for whom you have become responsible, you have not enough to make good your suretiship,—“Why should he take away thy bed from under thee?” This may seem a very rare case. Yet such creditors there have been, and may still be, whom selfishness and resentment drive to the extreme of harshness:—and whose irritation, perhaps, is exasperated by their seeing, that but for the said suretiship the party would have come to a stand and to a settlement earlier, and with so much the less loss to those whom he has involved. We are commanded to “love our neighbour *as ourselves* :” but to do for him what might expose us to having our very bed sold from under us, is to love him *better* than ourselves, which is a step beyond the divine injunction. And so many are the cases in which it is most difficult for us to get at the precise state and prospects of the person—friend though he may be—who makes the application, that there is hardly anything that calls for greater care, or warrants, in the eyes of all sensible and candid people, a larger measure of reserve, and even, generally speaking, of steady refusal.

Verse 28. “Remove not the ancient land-mark which thy fathers have set.”—This is in correspondence with the express statutes of the Mosaic law.\* The act is one of detestable deceit and fraud. A man may by this means, if he goes about it cautiously and by degrees, and chooses carefully his opportunities,—and especially when he has to do with one who is somewhat careless and unobservant in such matters,—add to the border of his own inheritance, and thus benefit himself and his family. But it is in a way which the God of truth and righteousness abhors. O let every one bear in mind, that how cleverly, ingeniously, and successfully soever this may be effected, and how secretly soever “from the eyes of all living,” eluding the detection of the defrauded himself, of his relations, and friends, and creditors, and of those public authorities to whom it is given in charge to search out frauds

\* See Deut. xix. 14; xxvii. 17.

and to right the injured,—yet is *it not unknown*. The eye sees it, to which “the darkness and the light are both alike.” Every inch of land, every fraction of wealth, so acquired, has the curse of the Just One upon it.

The words have been sometimes applied in a very different department—even to the danger and the criminality of intermeddling with old and long-established articles of doctrine in religion, and principles and statutes of civil polity. On this subject there are two extremes. There is, in the first place, an apprehensiveness and jealousy of all that bears the aspect of innovation, which is absolutely morbid, and becomes a weakness; and there is, in the second place, an excessive fondness for whatever has the charm of novelty to recommend it,—and a restless inquisitiveness after everything of the kind,—an incessant propensity to change, and to list for every shifting wind of doctrine. It may at once be admitted, that the latter is the more dangerous of the two:—and really when we see persons getting hold of principles which to them are new, becoming enamoured of them, pushing them to extremes, and perverting everything else into conformity with them,—hasty to question whatever is old, and as hasty to embrace whatever is novel,—so that, with minds unsettled and roving, it is impossible to predict to what lengths they are to go, and where they are to land,—we hardly wonder that others should run to the contrary extreme, be frightened from inquiry altogether, and speak, with grave apprehension, of the danger of “removing the old landmarks which our fathers have set.” It is clear, however, that there can be no period of prescription for truth,—or rather for falsehood,—no length of time, that is, by which error that has passed for truth can become anything else than error. No time can transmute wrong into right. Changes, no doubt, should be made with caution. The longer anything has been received as a truth, the improbability of its being found an error becomes ever the greater. But if any dogma in any human system of Christian doctrine is proved, from a full and careful investigation of the word of God, to have been set down and held as a truth by mistake,—it



would be a most strange and mischievous attachment to antiquity for its own sake, that would resist its being expunged and the truth discovered substituted in its room. Never must we forget, that the most ancient land-marks of truth and duty are those which have been fixed *here*—in the Bible—by the hands of prophets, apostles and evangelists, under the immediate direction of the “Spirit of the Lord.” There are none so old as these. From the Bible human standards have been formed. *Their* land-marks profess to be in agreement, in the bounding lines of truth and error marked out by them, with those which are set down there. But when, on a careful survey, any of them are found to have been misplaced, and to bring any part of the region of error within the boundary of the territory of truth,—their removal becomes a duty of imperative obligation. All that has been introduced, in the form of doctrine or of practice, inconsistent with the statements and prescriptions of the Inspired Volume, has been unwarrantable innovation; and to be charged with innovation for returning to the original and only authoritative test of truth and error, of duty and sin, would be most unreasonable. “The *traditions of the elders*,” among the Jews had great antiquity; yet they were *innovations*. “To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.” And then, as to innovations in the institutes of civil polity,—while hasty changes are admitted to be dangerous and undesirable, there is a clinging *to things as they are* that is little less than fatuous. To err is human. What system of human polity ever existed, that was perfect, and unsusceptible of improvement? While, therefore, in all that regards the constitution, and laws, and precedents of our national policy, every approach to a revolutionary spirit is greatly to be deprecated, yet the puerile dread of innovation ought not to prevent either the correction of abuses, or the introduction of improvements, corresponding with the advance of knowledge and experience. It should be laid down as a maxim that “*final measures*” belong only to God; that in all human administrations, the very phrase is presumption. Old customs cannot always suit new times and new circum-

stances. The occasions in which they originated pass away; the state of things is altered and reversed; and when change of condition requires change of law and practice, adherence to the old is folly.

The general principle laid down in the closing verse, is the *tendency* of diligence,—of activity, promptitude, and cleverness, quickness in apprehension, and dexterity and perseverance in execution,—to advancement in the world,—to the attainment of its wealth and its honours. It implies also, that wise and prudent princes will select for their own service and that of the state, men who have given proof of vigorous, intelligent, enterprising, and steadily persevering character in the departments in which they have been engaged:—“Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men.”

Reverting for a moment to the language of a former verse, let me, in conclusion, press earnestly upon all THE CERTAINTY OF THE WORDS OF TRUTH. The evidence of the divinity of the Bible, instead of ever being shaken by all the efforts of infidelity, has been augmenting from the beginning hitherto. Its *external* evidence has grown in the fulfilment of its predictions. Its *internal* evidence, though in one sense ever the same, has, in another, been increasing also; inasmuch as it has stood its ground amidst all the advances of human knowledge, and men have never been able to improve upon it or to get before it:—and it is the *one only book* of which this can be affirmed. And its *experimental* evidence,—the manifestation of its truth in its saving influence,—in its power to dislodge and change the evil passions and habits of the worst of men,—has multiplied by thousands and tens of thousands of dead and living witnesses. In our own days, we have but to point, not only to cases of revival in our own land, in which the gospel has proved itself “mighty through God” to the pulling down of the strongholds of worldliness and corruption, and turning hearts long alienated to God,—but to the lands of Heathen idolatry and cruelty and villainess, wherever Gospel truth has found its way and has been embraced. *There*, in the marvellous changes that have

been effected,—in the contrast between previous stupidity, and pollution, and heartless and murderous ferocity, to intelligence, and purity, and virtue, and peace, and harmony, and happiness, we have the triumphs of the Cross, and the manifestation of the “*certainty*”—the divine certainty—“of the words of truth.” They have thus shown themselves to be indeed “excellent things” by the excellence of their effects. We call upon all to examine for themselves. The Bible *courts examination*. It is the unwillingness and refusal to examine, that is most to be deplored. The genuineness of its writings, the authenticity of its histories, the reality of its recorded miracles, the fulfilment of its prophecies, the sublimity and consistent harmony of its doctrines, the purity of its precepts, the origin of its commemorative ordinances, and its tendency to personal and social virtue and happiness,—*all court examination*. The testimony of the celebrated earl of Rochester, when converted from infidelity and profligacy to Christianity and virtue, will be found the truth. Laying his hand on the Bible, he would say—“*This* is true philosophy. *This* is the wisdom that speaks to the heart. A bad life is the only grand objection to this Book.”

## LECTURE LXXI.



PROV. XXIII. 1—11.

“When thou sittest to eat with a ruler, consider diligently what is before thee; and put a knife to thy throat, if thou be a man given to appetite. Be not desirous of his dainties; for they are deceitful meat. Labour not to be rich; cease from thine own wisdom. Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven. Eat thou not the bread of him that hath an evil eye, neither desire thou his dainty meats; for as he thinketh in his heart, so is he: Eat and drink, saith he to thee; but his heart is not with thee. The morsel which thou hast eaten shalt thou vomit up, and lose thy sweet words. Speak not in the ears of a fool; for he will despise the wisdom of thy words. Remove not the old landmark; and enter not into the fields of the fatherless: for their redeemer is mighty; he shall plead their cause with thee.”

DILIGENCE is commended in the close of the preceding chapter; this opens with the commendation of *temperance* or *moderation*. This virtue the people of God ought to practise in every thing. They should “let their moderation be known unto all men”—that is, their self-government in the desire, the use, the enjoyment, and the regret, of all that pertains to the present world. In the opening verses, we have one particular description of moderation,—the laying of a restraint, at all times, but especially on occasions of peculiar temptation, on the *animal appetites*. The verses suggest the following observations:—

I. There are few things, if any, more disgusting and degrading, than the studied and anxious indulgence of these appetites:—to see a man surveying the table, with an epicure’s eye; carefully selecting his favourite articles; and in

his manner of preparing and eating them, making it manifest to all about him that his whole soul is on the contents of his plate, and that nothing annoys him so much as any interruption such as endangers their getting out of season, and losing their nice relish. It is particularly loathsome, when the man appears to catch with extraordinary avidity the occurrence of a feast, and to be resolved on making the most of the opportunity. What man can be more despicably low than he “whose God is his belly?” When Solomon says—“Consider diligently what is before thee,”—it is for a very different purpose, and in a very different frame of mind, from those I have been mentioning. It means—Consider well the scene of temptation that is before thee, and be upon thy guard.

2. There *are*, on such occasions, temptations to over-indulgence and excess. And then our self-jealousy and watchfulness should be proportioned to *two things*—namely, the *strength of propensity*, and the *amount of temptation*. This is the import of the strong expression in the second verse—“and put a knife to thy throat, if thou be a man given to appetite.” The import seems to be—Eat as if a knife were at thy throat;—eat in the recollection and impression of thine imminent danger; remember that the knife wherewith thou dost feast thy delicate or thy gluttonous appetite had better be at thy throat than used for such a purpose,—so prejudicial to health, to reputation, to the credit of thy profession, to the interests of thy soul. In several versions we have the sense given—“Otherwise thou wilt put a knife to thy throat, if thine appetite have the dominion.” For—

3. A man’s conduct, on such occasions, is *marked*;—especially if he be a religious professor. He may, in this way, bring reproach upon religion: which ever ought, and which, when genuine and duly felt, ever *will*, impose a restraint on such indulgences. How sad, when a religious professor gives occasion to the ungodly, with the leer of sarcastic scorn, to say—“Ah! did you see how the holy man—the man of spiritual abstraction—how he *did* enjoy himself!—he made the most of it!—with what a gusto, and

what culinary connoisseurship, he discussed his meal!" Thus are all his pretensions to spirituality turned to ridicule; and from his example encouragement is taken by others to persist in such indulgences and excesses: while any usefulness he might have is impaired and lost, and his reputation for consistency forfeited.

4. On the other hand, we should be on our guard against the *ostentation* of abstinence and plainness,—the *affectation* of extraordinary abstemiousness;—declining this, and refusing that, merely for the purpose of drawing attention, and further fixing that attention by incidental remarks—incidental in appearance but studiously introduced and timed,—for the express purpose of having it said—What a singularly abstemious man he is! how plain in his tastes! how exemplarily indifferent to the gratification of his appetite!—This would be little better than gratifying one carnal principle instead of another,—*vanity*, instead of gluttony or epicurism, the love of notice and distinction, instead of animal appetite and the love of dainty fare,—the lust of the *mind*, instead of the lust of the *flesh*.—Our duty, then, is—indifference to the indulgences of the table, without the obtrusive ostentation of it; eating and drinking in moderation, what is set before us, without the affectation of singularity.

5. There should be special vigilance, if there be reason to suspect any snare—any intended temptation, for answering a selfish or a malicious purpose. Worldly men sometimes do, very wickedly, lay such snares for the godly. They do so to try them,—for the diabolical satisfaction of witnessing the inconsistencies into which they thus seek to entice them. They then laugh at them, and make sport of their principles: for “fools make a mock at sin.”—I do not say that anything of this kind is meant to be conveyed by the terms of verse third—probably not. The meaning of that verse seems to be no more than that evil often lurks under the semblance of good;—that while present enjoyment is promised and pressed upon us, the consequences, if we suffer ourselves to be thrown off our guard, may be bitter.—“When you see a number of dishes, of

very different kinds," says a sensible expositor, "think with yourself—Here are fevers, and agues, and gouts in disguise. Here are snares and traps spread along the table, to catch my soul, and draw me into sin. *Sense* gives a good report of this plenty; but *reason* and *religion* tell me to take heed, for it is deceitful meat."

Verse 4. "Labour not to be rich; cease from thine own wisdom." "*Labour not to be rich.*" What a startling interdict this! What an immense proportion of the world's toil, and especially in such a community as our own, does it bring under condemnation and proscription! Were all the labour directed to this forbidden end to cease,—how little would be left!—what a sudden stagnation would there be of the turmoil of busy activity with which we are daily surrounded! What are the great majority of men about,—in our city and in our country? What keeps them all astir? What is the prevailing impulse of all the incessant bustle and eager competition of our teeming population? Are not all,—with a wider or a narrower estimate of what riches mean,—“labouring to be *rich*?”—The love of fame has been called the universal passion. Is not the love of money quite as much, if not more, entitled to the designation? Yes; and many a time does the *wisdom* of the world set itself to the defence of the world's toil and the world's aim—alleging many plausible, and some more than plausible, things in its pleadings. “Riches,” say they, “keep a man and his family from dependence. Riches enable a man to enjoy many comforts that are in themselves lawful and desirable. Riches procure a man distinction and influence in society. By this and other means, riches put it in a man's power to do good:—why should we *not* ‘labour to be rich?’” It is all true; and the plea is in part quite legitimate. Yet Solomon, by the Spirit, with the authority, and in the kindness of God, enjoins—“labour *not* to be rich.”

His meaning evidently is, that the acquisition of the worldly wealth must not be a man's *primary aim*—that which chiefly occupies his desires, his thoughts, his schemes, his time, and his toil,—to the neglect of concerns of incom-

parably higher importance, and to a forgetfulness of the amount of temptation, and of danger to these higher concerns, which success in his pursuit brings with it,—so as to preclude serious inquiry about the grand problem—the most momentous by infinite degrees, that can occupy the mind of man—*how an eternity of being may be to him an eternity of well-being.*

“*Cease from thine own wisdom,*” may be considered as regarding both the *object of pursuit*, and the *manner of pursuing it*. The object, considered as the main end of life, is infinitely unworthy of a reasonable being; and the manner in which the pursuit of it is carried on is characterized by a disregard of God that is the very essence of impiety. All this is true, even on the supposition that the result of the labour were *certain acquisition*, and the riches, when acquired, a *sure possession*,—sure for life and for posterity. But—

Verse 5. “Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven.”—How emphatically strong this language! “Upon that which *is not!*” So precarious are the riches when obtained, that they are hardly allowed the attribute of *existence!*—“that which *is not!*—How beautifully the air-bubble glitters in rainbow hues, as it floats on the stream, or mounts into the atmosphere!—but in a moment, it bursts, and is gone. Solomon here uses a different figure:—“for riches verily make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven.” Such was the experience of the wise man’s times:—surely I need not say in what a degree it has been the experience of our own. How frequently, and how affectingly in many cases, has it been exemplified!—Sometimes the wings grow gradually. Their begun and advancing growth is perceived by the owner, and the result dreaded, when others know nothing of it, and are fancying all secure. His eyes are sleepless with solicitude amidst the envy of the ignorant around him. At other times, the event is as unanticipated by the possessor as it is by others. The wings are the product of a moment, and the flight unexpected and sudden. A single unlooked for con-



tingency in providence,—and *all is gone!*—the accumulations of half a life-time vanished in an hour! A change in the commercial tariff of a foreign state;—a sudden fall in the markets;—a single unsuccessful speculation, from which additional thousands were expected;—the bankruptcy of some house that was esteemed of established and unshaken credit;—a hundred causes may, one or other, occasion the sudden annihilation of property and prospects. The very “*labouring*” to be rich,—the very *eagerness* after the object,—the “*hasting*” to its attainment, is not unfrequently the very means of bringing all to nothing.

“Wilt thou,” then, “*set thine eyes upon that which is not?*” To set the *eyes* upon it, is to set the *heart* upon it. The fixing of the gaze on any object, is the expression of *fond desire*. The original word contains the idea of *special avidity*. Nothing can be more unwise:—not only because we *may* lose the object of desire, how largely soever acquired, even while we are here, but because we *must* part with it very soon at the longest. Riches *may* leave us; *we must* leave riches. How simple, yet how conclusive the consideration—“We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out,” 1 Tim. vi. 7. And then—how solemn but how little thought of, the lesson which follows—“They that will be rich fall into temptation, and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil; which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows,” verses 9, 10.

Verses 6—8. “Eat thou not the bread of him that hath an evil eye, neither desire thou his dainty meats: for as he thinketh in his heart, so is he: Eat and drink, saith he to thee; but his heart is not with thee. The morsel which thou hast eaten shalt thou vomit up, and lose thy sweet words.”—We had formerly occasion to notice the different acceptations in which the phrase “*an evil eye*” is taken in Scripture. *Here*, it has evidently the sense of a covetous, penurious, stingy, grudging disposition. Such persons as are

here described were to be found then. They are to be found still. They invite and entertain others, under the impulse of various selfish motives. They must, for appearance and reputation's sake, pay back their debts of this description; or it is necessary in the way of business; or they like to make a little show, to gratify a spirit of ostentation, and yet grudge and fret at the means. Their entertainments, therefore, are not given from any motive of regard for any but themselves. So that, while with the lips, as a matter of course, they profess great hospitality—"Eat and drink, saith he to thee!"—every mouthful that is swallowed, when, unfortunately their invitation is accepted, is *eyed* with a secret twinge of fretful regret for having asked you. They would have been better pleased had the invitation been declined. How does this discover itself? It does not always. It may, at times, be pretty successfully concealed. But in general it may be known from the character of the parties, as apparent in other things. A stingy disposition can hardly hide itself. And when a man's general character is known,—it is known how very ill a particular display of profusion and finery assorts with his ordinary doings, and his established reputation; and hence cannot fail to arise the suspicion, and more than suspicion, that there is something under it,—something else than the unwonted appearance of friendly generosity. And then, unless the simulation is singularly well kept up indeed, the difference will be perceptible between the open, frank, sterling cordiality of genuine heart-felt kindness, and the affectation—the hypocritical pretence of it. The *eye* belies the lips. While he *says* one thing, he *looks* another. While "Eat and drink" is on his lips,—he will, at the same time, by his remarks on the dearth of living, and the high price of particular articles, and the great pains he has been at for your entertainment,—he will betray the true state of his feelings. They are far more with his *purse* than with his *guests*.

It is evident, from the very expression, that the man is supposed to be in some degree *known*. "The bread of *him that hath an evil eye*," means the provision of one, of whose

character this is a manifest feature. The dissuasive advice may be considered as suggested by different considerations. It is painful to the spirit of sensibility to be laid under obligation to men of this sort,—persons who hold their favours so high, and look for so much in return for them. It is, moreover, most irksome and distressing, to partake of any thing respecting which there is the remotest ground of surmise that it is grudgingly given. A share of the very homeliest meal,—even of the crust and water of the beggar,—with a real hearty welcome, is preferable to a place at the most sumptuously covered board, where the dainties have been provided and are partaken with a grudge. When this is the case, there is loathing at the very idea of having so much as tasted them. This appears to be the sentiment in the eighth verse:—“That which thou hast swallowed shalt thou vomit up.” The very thought of the spirit in which the entertainment has been given, will sicken thee to nausea:—and withal “thou shalt lose *thy sweet words*.”

“*Thy sweet words*” may mean the words spoken *by him to thee*. The guest at the time might augur good from them; might flatter himself with his being a special favourite; might, like Haman, go home merry and glad of heart, and full of expectation. But “the good words and fair speeches” were only another part of the simulation. They are mere air. They come to nothing. They are followed, when you have gone away, and he sees your back and the door fairly shut upon you, with fretting and grumbling against you for the expense you have put him to. He reckons up the cost, and curses you in his heart.—But, “*thy sweet words*” are more naturally understood of the words spoken *by thee to him*. They were words of thanks and compliment—of flattery for the style, abundance, and variety of his entertainment,—his equipage, his dishes, his wines; his entire set-out. They are *lost* on one who in truth, when all is known, so ill-deserved them,—a mere dissembler of hospitality and friendship. Your having accepted his invitation, laid him under the necessity of asking others; and your having partaken of his sumptuous dinner, is recorded in his mind

against you as a deadly offence; and all your "sweet words" go for nothing! Surely one would rather be famished than be regaled with such grudged abundance.

The injunction, or dissuasion, I need not surely say, is by no means intended to give any license or encouragement to a spirit of pride or disdain. No. It is only a salutary warning to be cautious of bringing yourselves under obligation to any selfish and hypocritical dissembler of kindness, who only wishes to lay you under such obligation to serve purposes of his own. The man who has thus entertained you will boast of his hospitality; tell others of it, making the most of it for his own behoof; set it down against you, debiting you on account of it with certain expected good turns at your hand, when he comes to need them. He will throw it up *to* you, should you not do all he looks for; or rail *at* you to others for ingratitude and meanness in forgetting his kindness. He will remind you of it again and again, with vexatious importunity,—teazing you for your favour and influence in some object he has in view for himself or his family. It is amazing what an amount of expectation a man of this sordid and selfish disposition will found upon *a dinner!* Your having sat at *his* table, eaten of *his* dainties, and drunk of *his* wines, is price enough even for your conscience itself. Beware of him. Keep yourself free.

There is nothing more odious in the sight of God than every description of hypocrisy, whether practised to Himself or to fellow-men. He "desireth truth in the inward parts." And let all bear in mind, that, whatever a man may succeed in feigning himself to be with his neighbours—the representation in the words before us is, in regard to God, always true—"As he thinketh in his heart, so is he." No imposture can succeed with God.

Verse 9. "Speak not in the ears of a fool; for he will despise the wisdom of thy words."—The lesson here taught is one of *discretion*. It refers to all cases, in which we have reason to apprehend that the latter part of the verse will be the result. In such cases, it is generally better to hold our peace; since by speaking we only give the fool occasion to

sin. There may be many cases in which it becomes essential for us to deliver our own souls by bearing our testimony to the truth, "whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear;" that our consciences may be at ease, being clear of their blood. And the lesson here taught is one of judicious discrimination as to the times and seasons when speaking is likely to be profitable, or the contrary. And the lesson relates, not only to our speaking directly to the fool himself, but to speaking *in his presence* and *in his hearing*, when, by his contradicting and blaspheming, or by his light and "foolish jesting," he may not only render what we say unavailing to others, but even injurious.\*

Verses 10, 11. "Remove not the old landmark; and enter not into the fields of the fatherless: for their Redeemer is mighty; he shall plead their cause with thee."—We had this subject before us, under its general form, in chap. xxii. 28. *Here* it comes before us in a more *special* form. But when the twenty-eighth verse of the preceding chapter is connected with the twenty-second and twenty-third, the connexion will render the lesson very much the same with that in the verses now claiming our attention. And its recurrence again is only an additional proof of the peculiar interest taken by the blessed God in the description of persons mentioned.

The shifting of landmarks, and the plundering of fields,—in *any* case a flagrant act of injustice and wrong,—is here represented as having in it a much more than ordinary heinousness when the objects of the unrighteous fraud and aggression are the *unprotected*—those who have been deprived of their natural guardian and maintainer of their rights and interests. The claim of such to sympathy and care is one which has been very generally admitted by mankind—in word and theory at least; but selfishness has too often come between the sufferers and the kindness which was their due. When, however, this has been, in any remarkable degree, the case, it has been regarded as indicating an inhu-

\* See chap. ix. 7, 8; Matt. vii. 6

manity that was fit for the perpetration of any deed whatever that is oppressive and ruthless. When Job's friends, in their irritation, are disposed to be most severe upon him, *this* is one of the charges they falsely prefer against him.\* And when Job draws the character of wicked men who merited the wrath of heaven, *this* is one of its heavy features.† And when he denies the charge against himself, the very opposite is strongly affirmed by him as the true description of his character.‡ On behalf of "*the fatherless*" God's jealous protection and avenging omnipotence are here anew pointedly pledged. The word for *redeemer* signifies the man who was "*next of kin*,"—the *kinsman*, on whom, by the law of Moses, it was incumbent, as a matter of duty, and with whom too it was a matter of interest, to look after the concerns of his poor relations; with whom lay indeed the avenging of their blood, if, in any case, their life should, in cruel selfishness, be taken away. It was on the principle of that statute that Boaz called upon the next of kin to come forward and redeem the inheritance of Elimelech at the hand of Naomi, and that, upon his hearing the conditions and declining, he did it himself. Now he who happened to be the *redeeming kinsman* might himself be poor, and powerless, and without either means or influence. But they should not, on that account, be unprotected and unbefriended. Jehovah himself would take the place of their kinsman,—would "*plead their cause*," would maintain their rights, would redress their wrongs, would bring His power to bear against their oppressors. *He* would fulfil for them the part of their near relation: and he is "*mighty*." Hear his words:—"Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child. If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry; and my wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword; and your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless," Exod. xxii. 22—24. These, you may think, are Old Testament threatenings, be-

\* Job xxii. 5—10.

† Job xxiv. 3, 4, 7—10.

‡ Job xxix. 11—13; xxxi. 16—22.

longing to a judicial law that has passed away:—or, more properly, they belong to the special *theocracy*, being strictly no part of the judicial law, inasmuch as they do not prescribe any punishment to be inflicted by the hand of man, but announce what Jehovah himself would, by his own interposition, execute. Be it so. But think you that the character of God has changed? Such assurances and threatenings are not mere warnings of punishment; they are *expressions of character*. And do you imagine that under the new dispensation,—which, in a special sense, is the dispensation of love, the ministration of mercy,—the compassion of Jehovah towards those who need it, has *diminished*? that His zeal in their behalf has suffered abatement? That, assuredly, were a grievous mistake. The God of love has not ceased to pity, and to pity with a special compassion, the unprotected, the friendless, the poor. Look at his character as it was manifested in the person of Him who could say—“He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father.” This exhibition of the divine character introduced the new and spiritual dispensation. And was there any failure of regard for the poor?—of pity for the fatherless and the widow?—of power in behalf of the destitute? Let not the oppressor fancy that there is no Jewish law now,—no *theocracy* now. There *is* a theocracy, although of a different kind. “The Lord reigneth;” and woe to the defrauder or oppressor of the destitute! He shall not escape. “Their REDEEMER” is no less “mighty” than he was of old. He will avenge their cause at last, with terrible retribution.

Let the poor, the fatherless, and the widow, when wronged, beware of harbouring and cherishing in their own bosoms the sentiments of resentment or revenge. Let them rather, in humility and forgiving meekness, put their case into the hands of Him, of whom it is said—“The poor committeth himself unto thee; thou art the helper of the fatherless.” He will appear for them. If God allows them to suffer, when thus submissive to His will, He will graciously give them to experience that “all things work together for their good,”—and that His “grace is sufficient for them;” and He

will at last give them to the full of "the unsearchable riches of Christ." In their most destitute condition even here, enjoying the rich provisions of the gospel, they have no reason to envy the wealthiest of the wealthy, the greatest of the great. The latter may envy *them*. Jehovah himself "is the portion of their inheritance and of their cup; he maintaineth their lot." He is theirs, and they are His. They who have the fulness of God's covenant promises have infinitely more than the world can give to its most successful and favoured votaries. They to whom Jehovah says, "Thy Maker is thy Husband," have strong consolation in their desolate widowhood. They who, though they are deprived of an earthly, have a heavenly Father, are better off than those who have the earthly without the heavenly. They who are heirs of the eternal inheritance, who are, in every step of life, advancing nearer to possession of that from which no power of earth or hell shall ever be able to eject them, are more blessed far than the men of this world whose possessions are *present*, who are, at every step through life, coming nearer to the end of their lease,—a lease of whose duration they themselves are ignorant, and which, at the will of the universal Proprietor, may terminate in a moment when least they are thinking of it. *Their* landmark is fixed for them in the better country. It shall never be removed. They shall be "found in their lot in the end of the days"—in the consummation of all things:—and having settled in that lot,—the lot of their inheritance,—they shall hold it in eternal security.



## LECTURE LXXII.

—◆—  
PROV. XXIII. 12—23.

“Apply thine heart unto instruction, and thine ears to the words of knowledge. Withhold not correction from the child; for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell. My son, if thine heart be wise, my heart shall rejoice, even mine; Yea, my reins shall rejoice, when thy lips speak right things. Let not thine heart envy sinners: but be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long. For surely there is an end; and thine expectation shall not be cut off. Hear thou, my son, and be wise, and guide thine heart in the way. Be not among winebibbers; among riotous eaters of flesh: For the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty; and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags. Harken unto thy father that begat thee, and despise not thy mother when she is old. Buy the truth, and sell it not; also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding.”

THE exhortation in the first of these verses, of which we have had the spirit and substance, though not the identical terms, frequently before us, is one that can never be too often repeated, or too urgently enforced. The words might be adopted by the teachers of all departments of useful knowledge, as their counsel to their pupils; and such an enlarged application of the words we can have no objection. But oh! my friends, and my young friends especially, we *do* feel that the admonition or the entreaty, has a peculiar appropriateness in the lips of those whose province it is to communicate *divine* knowledge,—the knowledge which God has been pleased to lay up in store by the inspiration of his Holy Spirit in this blessed Volume. Of its precious contents all of us have still much to learn. By whom have they ever been exhausted? The counsel, therefore, is in all cases,

appropriate. The oldest, the most experienced, and the best-informed Christian may take it, as well as the youngest beginner in the study of sacred science.

Verses 13, 14. "Withhold not correction from the child; for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell." We quoted these verses, in connexion with others on the same subject, formerly: and we entered then, pretty much at large, into what may be called the theory and practice of early discipline; of which, therefore, we do not now resume the discussion. I only entreat parents to mark, and to bear in mind affectionately and steadily, the *end* to be kept in view. It is to save from "the second death"—even "*from hell.*" Of all parental instruction, admonition, restraint, correction, example, and prayer, *this* is the great aim. How unutterably precious to the heart of every truly Christian parent! O the anguish of the thought of a child, the object of the heart's fondest love, dying that death, sinking into the pit of woe! That parent deserves not the name of Christian, who would not cheerfully lay down his own life, to save his child from such a doom. O! it was not the mere temporal death of Absalom, that wrung with agony the spirit of David, when, on hearing the tidings, he "went up to the chamber over the gate of his palace, and as he went, wept, and said—O Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!" It was not the thought merely of the darts with which the heart of that son had been transfixed, that pierced his own with grief so acute and overwhelming. It was the thought of his having died in rebellion against his father and against his God. This was the barbed and envenomed arrow, of which "the poison drank up his spirit."—And there is every reason to fear that a false tenderness, and an inexcusable laxity of parental discipline, had contributed to the profligate character and the fatal end of Absalom.

Let parents be further again reminded, that the conduciveness of correction to the end mentioned depends, to a very great extent, upon the *manner* of it. The *why*,—the *when*,—the *what*,

—and the *how?* are all most important questions, each requiring to be seriously pondered in this department of parental duty. “Beating with the rod” may be so applied as to beat folly *into* the child instead of *out of* him. Too often have parents whipped their children with indiscriminate harshness, with the tear of anger and not of love. They have measured the chastisement by the mischief done, rather than by the evil disposition displayed. They have made religious duties a task, and exacted their performance on pain of the lash, and visited their neglect with the rigour of corporeal discipline. They have conducted the entire process of educational training on a system of scolding, and driving, and coercion, and flogging. They have thus produced sullenness and disgust; secret and smothered irritation; aversion to all that bears the name or aspect of religion; duplicity and cunning; a longing for freedom,—for the hour of release from such restraint, and of becoming their own masters; and, when that hour arrives, unbridled licentiousness.

Verses 15, 16, “My son, if thine heart be wise, my heart shall rejoice, even mine. Yea, my reins shall rejoice, when thy lips speak right things.” What is the *wisdom* that is meant? The same which the writer so often describes\*—the wisdom of spiritual principle,—the wisdom of the fear and love and service of God,—the wisdom that chooses what is best and most lasting as its portion,—that aims at the very highest attainments of which created natures are capable, likeness to God as its character, and the enjoyment of God as the ALL of its happiness. It is this wisdom that is the spring of the intensity of joy, that is evidently implied in the emphatic repetition of the terms of delight *thrice* in these verses. *This*—Oh! this is what parents who themselves fear God should desire most earnestly to see in their rising offspring. *This* should most of all gladden their spirits. Their souls should thrill with joy—joy the purest, the most exquisite, as they discover the opening indication of right principle in the mind and heart—“*when*

\* See chap. i. 7; ii. 1—5; ix. 10.

*the lips speak right things;*”—when there is the language of truth, unvarying, undissembling truth; of reverence for God and divine things; of gentleness, and kindness, and obedience, and sensibility to reproof, and apprehension of evil,—all manifesting an inward and vital change.

But here I must address to parents a word of caution. They are exposed to the danger of one or other of two extremes:—

1. The first is that of *expecting too much* in children:—more than, from the nature of the case, we are at all warranted to expect. An extreme it assuredly is to leave out of account the natural buoyancy and glee and frivolity and fickle mutability of childhood, and, at that early period, to look for the consistency, gravity, and stayedness of advanced life. To this extreme those are specially more prone, whose minds have in them a tendency to the gloomy and morose. Persons of this mental cast are ready to construe all the harmless merriment and sprightly playfulness and light-heartedness and fun of children, and all their trifling, nonsensical talk, into sad indications of the want of grace and of the fear of God. This is expecting children to be men; ay, and something more. I would say to parents, If you wish to gain the ear and the interest of your children to your graver instructions and counsels at graver seasons, you must win their affections by entering kindly and cheerily into their innocent pastimes. Be merry with *them* if you wish them to be grave with *you*.

2. Then, there is the other extreme of being *satisfied with too little*. This is sadly common,—especially with parents of an easy, credulous, unsuspecting temperament. They are prone to flatter themselves that all is well,—to be easily pleased with their children, and thus to make their children (for in this lies the danger) too easily pleased with themselves. They are too prone to treat as levities what ought to be treated as *sins*, and to be content with symptoms of goodness that are at best equivocal and precarious. While I would warn parents against being too easily or hastily satisfied with the symptoms of early piety, and against

allowing themselves to be deceived, by confounding the *imitative*, merely, or the effect of the *wish to please*, with the real operation of the germinant principles of godliness in the heart, yet would I not be understood as speaking the language of discouragement. Most delightful, indeed, it is to mark the effects, in the progress of early instruction,—the listening ear,—the moist and melting eye,—the tender conscience,—the fondness for the Bible,—the disposition to prayer, though in “the simplest form of speech that infant lips can try,”—the sensitive regard to truth, and all the indications of a filially affectionate and obedient heart.

3. I call on all the young now hearing me to mark the expressions in these verses. They are evidently intended to operate as a *motive*. If not, what is their meaning? They are an appeal—pointed and touching—to filial affection:—“My son, if thou be wise, *my heart shall rejoice, even mine.*” The latter words have been rendered—“*yes, I myself*”—the father, the mother, whom you love, and who, you know, so tenderly loves you. Would you make glad the hearts of these your parents—dearest to you of all on earth?—then yield to the admonition, “*Apply thine heart unto instruction, and thine ears to the words of knowledge.*” Not, as I have before said, that this is to be your *only*, or even your *chief* motive. Imagine not that I am exhorting you to piety, *merely* to please your parents. In that case, there would be no fear of God in the matter. It would be fear and love “in word,” not “in deed and in truth.” It would be profession without principle; the most worthless of all things. The authority of the blessed God himself must be your supreme consideration,—associated with regard such as He enjoins, to your best and highest, your everlasting interests. But with these, in all propriety, may be associated also the consideration of the delight it will afford to the hearts of your parents. I would not have you depart, in one iota, from *principle*—from what the word of God tells you is right, to please even the dearest of parents; for God’s claims, both on the ground of authority and love, are *first*. But when the thing itself is right—divinely right—then there

can be no harm surely in your having a respect, in doing it, to the gratification and happiness of those whom, next to God, it is incumbent upon you to honour and to love.

We may take in, in this connexion, verses 24, 25 :—“The father of the righteous shall greatly rejoice; and he that begetteth a wise child shall have joy of him. Thy father and thy mother shall be glad, and she that bare thee shall rejoice.” In the verses on which we have been commenting, Solomon,—whether or not with his own son Rehoboam in his mind we cannot determine,—speaks in the character of a *father*. Thus at least I have understood him, although it is possible that he may use the compellation “*My son*” as one of fatherly affection to youth in general, in the same way in which similar designations are used by inspired apostles in the New Testament. The strength of the language, however, corresponds so much with that in other passages, that I cannot but think the light in which we have taken them up the more natural one. In these two verses, the united joy of *both* parents,—their sympathy of fervent delight—in witnessing the piety and virtue of their children,—dear to them as their very heart’s blood, nay as their own souls,—is expressed with emphatic tenderness and force. And observe the peculiar stress that is laid on the *mother’s* affection :—“Thy father and *thy mother* shall be glad, and *she that bare thee* shall rejoice.” I believe there are not, in the whole compass of animated nature, feelings of more exquisite tenderness, than those of a mother of sensibility, whose instinctive love is heightened and hallowed by piety.—“A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world,” John xvi. 21. This is the *first* joy of a mother;—a joy which, when the conjugal bond has been one of true affection, is intensely shared by him who is the partner of every throb of delight or of sorrow that visits her heart. But besides this first joy we have here before us another,—a purer, a higher, a nobler, a more lasting. The former is the joy of *nature*; this, the joy of

*grace*;—the former, the joy that “a man-child is born into the world,” the heir of a fleeting and precarious life; the latter, that an immortal has become a child of God’s spiritual family, and an heir of life eternal. This, then, my youthful hearers, is a very tender appeal,—well fitted to touch and move the heart of every right-minded and affectionate son or daughter:—“*she that bare thee shall rejoice.*” O! did you but know all that she has felt and suffered for you,—her anxieties, her alarms, her watchings, her tears, her prayers—it would “pierce you through with many sorrows” to be the occasion of sending a single pang to her bosom. That youth is ominously hardened,—is fit for any of the dark deeds of hell,—whose heart does not soften towards the mother that bare him! I hardly can fancy any other description of right feeling remaining in that breast. Every warm drop of generous sensibility must have been wrung out from the heart, ere it parted with its sense of a mother’s love,—ere those earliest and tenderest meltings of nature ceased to be felt!

And what is the special joy of which Solomon speaks? It is the joy of parents who, having been the instruments of giving you being, yearn for the happiness of the being they have given. They have learned to view *your* existence, as well as their own, *in its eternity*. They have given commencement to an existence that is never to close,—to the existence of an accountable agent, whose unending state is to be bliss or woe! Can you wonder at their solicitude? or can you wonder at the joy, when they see the germs of eternal goodness and eternal blessedness putting themselves forth, even in their most incipient promise, in your hearts and characters? O! *this* is joy indeed! If the child *lives*, it is joy *in his life*; for he will live unto God. If the child *dies*, and dies before his parents, it is joy *in his death*, as he leaves behind him grounds of assurance that he is gone to live unto God in a higher, a holier, and a happier world. And if they die before the child, it is joy *in their own departure*, as they leave him in the cheering hope of his following them to glory. It is joy at the tribunal of Christ in the great day, to have their child with them on the right hand of the

Judge, and included with them in the gracious welcome—"Come, ye blessed!" and it is joy in heaven for ever, in the joint participation of its pure and perfect felicity! O what a joy, here and hereafter,—on earth and in heaven,—when parents and children, united by the ties of nature, are, at the same time, all one in the bond of grace,—one *with* Christ, and one *in* Christ,—and thus, having enjoyed the happiness of this double union in the present world, meet in the world to come—

"And form a family anew,  
Unbroken in the skies!"

Mark the striking antithesis in next verse, where the address is still to youth:—"Be not envious of sinners; but be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long." Such envy produces the danger of casting off the fear of God. But cultivate this fear. Cleave, with increasing firmness and constancy, to God and to his ways; and by and by, sinners will envy *you*:—"For (v. 18) surely there is an end; and thine expectation shall not be cut off." Here, I apprehend, is a twofold consideration enforcing the counsel. The words refer at once to the *end of the sinner*, and to the *fulfilment of the hope of the righteous*. Ah! my youthful hearers, the prosperity of sinners, by which you are so prone to be deceived, is a delusive prosperity, seducing them from God, and luring them to eternal death. "Their *end* is destruction." But, of those who are "in the fear of the Lord the *expectation shall not be cut off*." No. It shall be realized and satisfied to the full—satisfied in the enjoyment of perfect, unchanging, endless bliss.

We shall dwell but briefly on the verses which follow:—verses 19—22. "Hear thou, my son, and be wise, and guide thine heart in the way. Be not among winebibbers; among riotous eaters of flesh: for the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty; and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags. Hearken unto thy father that begat thee, and despise not thy mother when she is old."—"The way" in which Solomon, in the first of these verses, enjoins the



young to “*guide their hearts,*”—is clearly “the way of God’s commandments”—the way of believing and holy obedience. And the counsel can only be complied with by your taking *God’s Word* as your directory for the way, and seeking God’s promised Spirit to make the way, by means of it, plain before your face; to save you from all biassing and seducing influences, and incline your heart steadily to follow it.

The warning against gluttony and drunkenness—against the sensual indulgences of the table—is enforced by motives taken from *the effects* of such a course. “Be not *amongst them*”—that is, be not *one of them*: be not thyself a glutton or a drunkard;—thus degrading thyself below the beasts; contracting guilt before God; searing thy conscience; deadening thy heart to every good impression; preparing thyself for every other description of wickedness, and for temporal and eternal ruin. The three things in the 21st verse are often united in the same character. *Indolence* frequently leads to gross indulgences; and it is ever confirmed and increased by them,—the habits grow together; and what good can be looked for to the person or the family of the lazy beastly sot?—the lowest, the most contemptible, and the most loathsome of all characters; whose time is divided between eating and drinking and sleeping, except the remnant that is given to debauchery and wickedness of other kinds. Shun, then, their company—for *two* reasons;—lest you *learn their ways*, and lest you *share their doom*.

The next verse is a repetition of the counsel in previous verses—but with an addition. The addition is—“despise not thy mother *when she is old.*” There is a connexion to be noticed, of this verse with the two preceding. The youth who frequents such company as they describe, will find much said, of which the object is, to *coax* him to go to excess. Among other things, he will hear not a little of the *unreasonableness* of parents in not making allowance for the young,—in tying down youth to the maxims and the precision of age. What harm in a little joviality?—it is natural to youth; why not indulge it? And if his father or his mother be

“*old*,” he may hear hints, perhaps, with a shrug of the shoulders, and a sly look to those about him, of the good old gentleman, or the good old lady, that is beginning to get into *dotage*, and has forgotten what it is to be young. Now, mark me:—the youth who allows himself for once and for one moment to listen to such reflections, has already begun to violate the command here given.

Respect was enjoined by the law to old age.\* What peculiar respect then, must be due to the silver locks of a father or a mother!—How incumbent the duty to smoothe, by every affectionate and reverential attention and kindness, the declining path to the tomb of those who have been the guardians of your childhood and youth!—to strive to make them happy, instead of breaking their hearts by neglect and misconduct! Fearful was the retribution of the stubborn and rebellious son, under the law:—“If a man have a stubborn and rebellious son, which will not obey the voice of his father, or the voice of his mother, and that, when they have chastened him, will not hearken unto them: then shall his father and his mother lay hold on him, and bring him out unto the elders of his city, and unto the gate of his place; and they shall say unto the elders of his city, This our son is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton, and a drunkard. And all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, that he die: so shalt thou put evil away from among you; and all Israel shall hear, and fear,” Deut. xxi. 18—21. This law is passed away. But it indicated *the mind of God*. And the rebellious son is still as of old, the object of His condemnation, and will be visited with His vengeance.

Verse 23. “Buy the truth, and sell it not; also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding.” The allusion is to the merchandise of the world;—the buying and selling of its commodities. In such merchandise, benefit is expected from both. A merchant buys, for the very purpose of selling; and he will not buy, unless he has a pretty good assurance

\* Lev. xix. 32.

that he can sell *at a profit*; that he can *get* for his article more than he has *given*. The case here, then, is quite a peculiar one. It is *all buying*. The article is one which is to be *bought*, but *never sold*. And why? For the best possible reason,—that *it never can be sold at a profit*, there is nothing *too valuable* to be *given* for it, there is nothing *valuable enough* to be *taken* for it. Get for it whatever else we may, the bargain will be a losing one.

The latter clause of the verse may be considered as comprehended in the former; for to secure "*the truth*" is to secure "wisdom, instruction, and understanding;" and of wisdom and understanding the highest proof is the securing of "the truth." In further illustration then of the words "*Buy the truth, and sell it not*," observe:—

1. The buyer *tests his article*. He uses means to ascertain its *genuineness*. Suppose it is an article whose component parts are "gold and silver, precious stones, and pearls." Such to the eye it appears. Such, by him who offers it for sale, it is declared to be. But the cautious purchaser will make sure of his bargain; and all the surer, the higher the price. He will assay the purity of the gold and silver; and chemically ascertain that the precious stones and the pearls are not factitious imitations.

Now, all that is presented to us *as truth*, must thus be *tested*. It must be proved to be what it professes to be. In *physical science*, scientific men will not take upon trust what professes to be a new discovery—especially if it happens to be at variance with previous theories,—without examining thoroughly the experiments by which it is said to have been ascertained, and trying, by counter-experiments, to determine whether there has been any slip or mistake in the processes, and any consequent fallacy in the conclusion. Thus too does the metaphysician in regard to every new theory in *mental science*; and the moral philosopher in the department of *ethics*. Everything in the various provinces of inquiry is examined by evidence according with its nature. The one question is—*Is it truth?* TRUTH alone is valuable; alone worthy to be received and held.

Now, we are as far as possible from wishing it to be otherwise in the department of *religion*. In proportion to the importance of the case,—to the height of the authority on which the claims to acceptance are rested,—the magnitude at once of the benefits promised, and of the risks incurred,—ought to be the solicitude and care with which the testing process is conducted. This then is the last department of all, in which what professes to be truth should be taken upon trust; in which inquiry should be careless, and faith easy. The obligation to examine is imperative and solemn; and marvellous, indeed, is the indisposition of men to enter on the investigation. Men who, with the utmost earnestness and perseverance, will test every alleged truth in science, in history, or in politics, cannot be persuaded to apply their powers to an inquiry more important, by infinite degrees, than any other that can engage the attention of the human mind! They either decline it altogether, or they set about it with a levity and a superficiality utterly at variance with what such a question demands, and from which no just appreciation or correct conclusion can be anticipated.

2. It is not enough for the buyer to ascertain the *genuineness* of his article. He sets about estimating its real worth; its worth *intrinsically*, and its worth *adventitiously*; its worth *in itself*, and its worth *to him*. The two may be widely different. The diamond is of incomparably more intrinsic worth than the grain of barley; but the cock in the fable spurned away the former and picked up the latter. In the present case,—having once ascertained the divine authority of the record,—there can be no hesitation about either the *intrinsic* or the *relative* value of what it makes known. *All truth* is precious; but its preciousness is, of course, endlessly varied in degree. Two things may be considered as combining to constitute its value. These are—its *subject*, and its *utility*. In natural science some truths present a union of both. The discoveries of astronomy, for example, are, many of them, full of intrinsic interest from their vastness and sublimity, and the impressions they give of the transcendent majesty of God; while, in some of their practical bearings, they are of

pre-eminent advantage to men. But in a peculiar sense may this be affirmed of the discoveries of divine revelation. These discoveries present views of God's moral government, in its great essential principles and in their practical application, such as have in them a weight of moral grandeur, and a consequent depth of absorbing interest surpassing all that nature can disclose. And, while they possess intrinsic preciousness above all other truths,—think of their value when estimated by the blessings which are unfolded in them, and to which the faith of them introduces the believer, in time and in eternity! The purchaser values the article he is about to purchase, by the amount of benefit the possession of it will bring him. In like manner must you estimate the value of “the truth” you are here counselled to buy. The value of it, in this view, is summed up by our Lord himself, when he says—“THIS IS LIFE ETERNAL.” What then, the real worth to you, of any other compared with this?

3. The buyer, when he has estimated the value of his article, *makes proportional sacrifices* to obtain possession of it. Foolish estimates there may be; and these foolish estimates may be the occasion of foolish bargains; and these may be the grounds of regret and self-dissatisfaction. But supposing the certainty of all the benefits, for time and eternity, which in the Bible are promised and guaranteed in connection with “*the truth*,” O! what is there, in the whole compass of what this world can confer, that should not, without one moment's hesitation, be sacrificed for its attainment?

The language, observe, does not refer to any compensation to the Author of “the truth,”—anything to be given by which we can ever make it ours by purchase—ours as a matter of *right* or *desert*.\* But there are some things which stand in competition with it. These must be parted with if *it* is to be ours; and these, whatever they may be, are what Solomon had in his eye, and what our Lord had in *His*, when the one directly, and the other virtually, counsels the

\* See Isa. lv. 1; Rom. vi. 23; Rev. xxii. 17.

sacrifice of them all for the sake of it.—By the “pearl of great price,” and by the “treasure hid in the field,” our Lord meant the blessings of the gospel,—“the unsearchable riches of Christ;” and all these are comprehended in “*the truth*” here spoken of. And in His parables, there is a manifest reference to the circumstances in which many of those who embraced the principles of His kingdom,—who believed and professed “*the truth*,” would be placed,—the sacrifices they might be called to make, on account of those principles. Often does He forewarn his disciples of this; and tells them faithfully the necessity of preferring their principles, and parting with every thing for them,—and for the blessings of course associated with them; believing that at every kind and amount of sacrifice, they should be gainers.\* He holds out encouraging assurances to them of what would be infinitely more than a compensation for any such sacrifices.† In *all* cases the bargain is one of gain,—gain unspeakable.

4. In proportion to the buyer’s estimate of his article, and the cost at which he has obtained it, will be the jealousy with which he retains and guards it. “*Sell it not.*” Selling the truth, is not simply letting slip from the mind the remembrance or the knowledge of mere abstractions; it is to give up the profession and faith of it for the sake of the very things which we sacrificed for it.—But “*sell it not.*” Sell it not for the *pleasures of sin*. Sell it not for the *riches and the honours of the world*. O part not with “the pearl of great price” for the husks which the swine do eat. And sell it not for *any other description of knowledge*. Sell not the most valuable of all knowledge, for that which, how legitimate and attractive soever, can never compensate for the loss of the other, or ever supply its room. Let no book usurp the place of your Bible. The more you know of “the truth” revealed in it; the more richly “the word of Christ dwells in you;” the more you have experimentally tasted its sweetness and felt its blessed and holy power upon your

\* See Luke xiv. 33. † Matth. xvi. 24—27; Matth. xix. 27—29.

hearts,—the more unwilling you will be to part with it; the more tasteless in comparison will every other kind of reading and knowledge become to you; and, were a library of all the world's literature and science, in all their departments, put in your offer for YOUR BIBLE, you would bind the sacred treasure to your hearts, and reject the offer, saying, as you clasped it to your bosom, with tears of gratitude —“THIS IS LIFE ETERNAL.”

Get THE TRUTH, then, at *any* price; part with it at *no price*. And, be *prompt with your bargain*. Those who are much set upon an article, will not delay their purchase, lest perchance it should pass from their hands. Blessed be God! there is no danger here, so far as others coming forward before you is concerned. The store of divine truth and divine blessing is never reduced by the number of purchasers. One buying—thousands buying—will not leave the less for you, or at all interfere with your obtaining, whensoever you make up your mind. But if not now prompt and decided, you may be thwarted in another way. There is one who may ere you are aware, decide the matter for you, by *putting the acquisition for ever out of your power*. DEATH may lay his sudden arrest upon you. And if THE TRUTH is not then yours; if its blessings and its hopes are not then yours,—*woe unto you!* You gain the world, you LOSE YOUR SOUL; and in the bitterness of hopeless despair will deplore your bargain through eternity.

## LECTURE LXXIII.

—◆—  
PROV. XXIV. 1—12.

“Be not thou envious against evil men, neither desire to be with them. For their heart studieth destruction, and their lips talk of mischief. Through wisdom is an house builded, and by understanding it is established; and by knowledge shall the chambers be filled with all precious and pleasant riches. A wise man is strong; yea, a man of knowledge increaseth strength. For by wise counsel thou shalt make thy war; and in multitude of counsellors there is safety. Wisdom is too high for a fool; he openeth not his mouth in the gate. He that deviseth to do evil shall be called a mischievous person. The thought of foolishness is sin; and the scorner is an abomination to men. If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small. If thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death, and those that are ready to be slain; if thou sayest, Behold, we knew it not; doth not he that pondereth the heart consider it? and he that keepeth thy soul, doth not he know it? and shall not he render to every man according to his works?”

THE first verse of this chapter is very naturally connected with the close of the chapter preceding. Truly there is little room for “*envy*” of such characters as the one there so graphically depicted; and of all men on earth, they will be the last whose company will be “*desired*” by the wise and the good.—But the counsel before us may be taken more generally. Far be it that “*evil men*” of any stamp should be envied—either for their *boasted freedom* or their *apparent prosperity*. Their freedom is but the semblance of the blessing. It is the reality of bondage. They promise liberty, and are themselves the slaves of corruption. And their prosperity—O deem it not a mark of God’s favour! It is all deceitful. It ends in ruin. “*Desire not to be with*



*them.*" How oft-repeated is this counsel!\* And how often is the warning enforced by similar reasons!—"For their heart studieth destruction, and their lips talk of mischief."—Their designs of evil duly matured find utterance. They communicate their projects to others like-minded with themselves;—projects of fraud, speculation, robbery; or if, on such matters, there be a sense of social honour, and an adherence to the conventional morality of the world, there may be projects of *impurity*,—of lewdness and seduction; of drunken frolic and revel; of the snares of temptation for some simple but sober youth, whom it will be so excellent a joke to induce to join them in sin. All this, under what palliative epithets soever it may pass in the world, is "*mischief*" and "*destruction.*"

Verses 3—6. "Through wisdom is an house builded, and by understanding it is established; and by knowledge shall the chambers be filled with all precious and pleasant riches. A wise man is strong; yea, a man of knowledge increaseth strength. For by wise counsel thou shalt make thy war; and in multitude of counsellors there is safety."—In these verses the tenses are, in the original, *future*: and by some are rendered, as the future tense in the Hebrew frequently is—"By wisdom *let* thy house be builded," &c. In all probability, such is the designed connexion. *Envy* at the prosperity of evil men might be a temptation to seek the furtherance of personal or domestic estate *by improper*, and thus emphatically *foolish*, *means*.

The "*building* of a house" indicates *the advancement of family prosperity*, and the "*establishment*" of it is the maintenance of that prosperity. "Wisdom," "understanding," and "knowledge," in this, as in other places, have much the same signification; and are not intended to be minutely analysed into their precise shades of difference. No doubt they imply ordinary prudence and discretion,—the management of everything on intelligent and well-examined principles, and in harmony with the maxims of a *sound*

\* Chap. i. 10; chap. iv. 14, 15.

and judicious policy. Neither personal nor family estate can prosper without this. I am disposed, however, to think when I consider the sense in which these terms are generally used by the writer of this Book, that they mean here something more:—that they have more especial reference to the *general tendency* of the principles of *true religion*, when consistently carried out. When thus carried out in the intercourse of life, and the transactions of business, they lead to the uniform practice of all the social virtues. Now such a manifestation of the influence of these principles, as satisfies the world that he who is under their dominion *may be trusted*,—may be safely depended upon to any extent,—obviously has a tendency to the building, establishing, and ample storing and furnishing of the house,—that is, to *the prosperity of personal and domestic interests*. The blessing of God is upon the labours of those who thus honour Him by a consistent exhibition of the principles which have His approbation and sanction. Not that God engages by promise for the invariable success and prosperity of all they plan and do. He reserves to himself the prerogative of selecting, in this, as well as in any other department, the means of salutary and faithful discipline. And the man who sets a due value upon the divine blessing, and knows that that blessing can only be enjoyed in the way of consistent obedience,—even though his efforts should not be crowned with success, yea, though all on earth should fail him, will hold fast his integrity. Having faith in God, he will firmly trust that it is for some end in full harmony with the promises of His covenant, and subservient to their ultimate fulfilment, that He is pleased, instead of building, to stop or partially to pull down the rising house, to shake its stability, or to dismantle it of its furniture and diminish its stores. Never will he have recourse to any methods for the prevention of such results that are not in perfect accordance with the principles and precepts of God's Word; for well he knows that it is such riches only as are gotten in the fear of the Lord, in the spirit of dependence and the exercise of obedience, that can ever merit the appellation here given them, of "*pre-*

*cious and pleasant riches.*” And “precious and pleasant” they are when enjoyed with a sense of God’s love,—with His paternally gracious smile—when God is in them all.

“Wisdom” and “knowledge” are, in the *fifth* verse, represented as procuring, in addition to prosperity, *influence* and *power*:—“A wise man is strong; yea, a man of knowledge increaseth strength.” One great use of *strength* is the *security* of its possessor:—and this end is represented as still more effectually answered by *wisdom*. It has a tendency to this result by the respect which it commands, and by the confidence which it inspires. It holds proverbially true, as a general maxim, that *knowledge is power*; and especially knowledge in union with *wisdom*. Wisdom may, to a vast extent, supply the want of power; but not power the want of wisdom. And taking wisdom in the sense of *true religion*, it imparts security to its possessor, which no amount of power which mortal can enjoy is capable of yielding. By *making God his confidence* it imparts the security to be found in the combined wisdom and power of the Infinite.

In the *sixth* verse the general principle and spirit of the passage is applied especially to *kings*:—“For by wise counsel thou shalt make thy war; and in multitude of counsellors there is safety.” This stands opposed to *two cases*,—that of the self-sufficient and self-willed monarch, on the one hand, who follows *his own way*, and will take no counsel *at all*:—and on the other that of the monarch who places his entire confidence in some single favourite, who, by flattery or otherwise, has gained an ascendancy over him,—who gives himself up entirely to his counsel. To the subjects of the monarch, in both cases, there is danger; especially when, either by the haste and pertinacity of self-will, or by submission to the self-interested and flattering advice of a favourite minister and minion, they are induced to undertake rash and unrighteous wars—wars justifiable by no plea of *necessity*, which is the only plea of justice.\*

Since the kings of Israel and Judah may be considered

\* Compare chap. xx 18.

as specially referred to, the former part of the verse might, with some plausibility, be regarded as having reference to the counsel which the *good* kings solicited and obtained from the inspired and commissioned prophets, who on such occasions were either sent to them with express messages, or sent for by them to receive direction from the Lord. The latter part of the verse, however, appears rather to favour a more general interpretation; inasmuch as, when inspired prophets were consulted, the safety did not arise from "*the multitude of counsellors.*" The voice of God by *one*, when well accredited, was as sure as if it had been by hundreds:—and *one* of the prophets of Jehovah was better than any number of others.\* While the general principle holds true that in cases of importance it is well not to trust to any single judgment, yet is there room for exception and for caution:—for sometimes in "*the multitude of counsellors*" there is *distrac-tion* and *indecision*—and all the evils consequent upon delay, or upon dubious, shifting, vacillating measures, measures adopted without confidence, and prosecuted without energy.

There is a war in which sinners are engaged, which all the created counsel in the universe, united in its support, would not only fail to justify in the principle of it, but could not free from the charge of madness in its utter hopelessness. "Wo to the man that striveth with his Maker!" O hearken to no counsellors that would encourage you in maintaining that war. All the counsellors in this Book, with one voice,—the voice of earnestness, authority, and affection, dissuade you from it. Here is a "*multitude of counsellors;*" and here is "*safety.*" And yet the counsel of them all is but one. They all wrote by one Spirit, and their counsel is the counsel of God. Obey it and live.

In the verse following, we have first, *a matter of fact*,—"Wisdom is too high for a fool."—The *fool* in this verse is probably the same as the *evil man* in the first. He is the man of low, grovelling dispositions, desires, and pursuits,—who "*minds earthly things;*" seeks his enjoyment in the

\* Comp. 1 Kings xxii. 10—30.

gratifications of sense; does not even cultivate his mind, far less aspire at the highest of all wisdom, “the wisdom that cometh from above,”—the illumination of heaven, the knowledge of God’s word, and the course of life which is in accordance with its principles and directions.—Wisdom being *too high* for him, does not mean that it is of such difficult acquisition as to be beyond the reach of his natural powers; (were that the case he would not be blameworthy for the want of it) but that he has no desire after it, and therefore will put himself to no trouble to attain to it. The “price of wisdom” may be “in his hand,” but he has “no heart to it,” and therefore it lies neglected and remains as far from him as ever.

Then we have *the natural consequence*—“*He openeth not his mouth in the gate.*” As “*the gate*” means the place of public assembly and judgment, the expression is evidently equivalent to—*men never think of placing him in any situation of honour or of trust.* They never consult him in difficulties; never choose him as an arbitrator or judge in any cause or controversy. He may be ready enough to “open his mouth;” he may have a sufficiently good opinion of what he has to say; the greater his folly, the more may be his self-conceit; the emptier of all that is worth having, the fuller is he of himself. But his opinion is never asked; and when he does put himself forward to give it ultroneously, all are impatient; he is *put down*, his judgment being held in contempt.

Verses 8, 9. “He that deviseth to do evil shall be called a mischievous person. The thought of foolishness is sin; and the scorner is an abomination to men.”—The *spirit* of these two verses is the same, though the expression be different. There seems at first view in the former something like the tameness of a truism. *To be sure*, one might say, who *should* be called a mischievous person, if not the *deviser of evil*? Two remarks may place it in a correct light:—1. The deep designing villain, who hatches in secret his schemes of evil, may have art enough to draw, by his sly and insidious and plausible representations, the simple and unwary

into participation,—and even, as his tools, to take the chief part—in their execution. In these circumstances, the verse teaches that *the deviser* of the evil should have the infamy, the guilt, the condemnation, the punishment. *He* is the “mischievous person;” not his unsuspecting and inexperienced dupe. And, when the facts of the case are discovered, and it comes to be known how it stands, *so it will be*. Men will generally have justice enough to lay the blame, and to affix the infamy and the stigma in their proper place.—2. Thus too it is *in the estimate of God*. The “*deviser of evil*” is, in His eyes, the “mischievous person;” and shall be held and treated, condemned and punished, as such, even although his devices should never be carried into execution at all, or should be executed by others than himself.—This, you perceive, brings the sentiment into a close affinity with the first clause of the following verse:—“The *thought* of foolishness is sin.” But while this connexion may be recognised, the sentiment must be *generalized*. It holds true in the utmost latitude of application. *Every* foolish thought—every imagination, every wish, though never uttered to men, and never so much as indicated, even by a look,—is perfectly before the all-seeing, all-searching eye of God. And observe—it is not *known* only; it “is *sin*.” If the *thinker* of the evil *meant* to be also the *doer* of it, and was prevented only by causes which he could not control, he will be regarded by the righteous Judge as if he had actually done it. It stands, in the book of God’s remembrance, *the same as if thus recorded against him*.

How deeply solemn in this view the statement! O how much passes in the mind and heart, to which fellow-men are strangers,—to all of which God is privy! And how does this accumulate the amount of sin in the divine indictment against every one of us! And how should a consciousness of this shut us up to exclusive reliance on the mercy of the gospel! There is not one secret “thought of evil,” that does not require for its forgiveness the virtue of atoning blood; and that does not require faith in that blood, confession, and

supplication for mercy, in order to the sinner's obtaining the forgiveness! Well, then, may we exclaim, "If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquity, O Lord, who could stand!"

We have, observe, in the phraseology of this part of the verse, the clearest evidence that *foolishness* means more than mere *weakness*, mere intellectual imbecility. It is here, manifestly, *moral pravity*.

In the latter part of the verse, "the scorner is an abomination to men,"—"the *scorner*" means, as in other cases, one who openly scoffs at all the restraints of divine authority, the precepts of law, and the principles of rectitude; by whom they are, in word and act, set at defiance; who not only *devises* evil, but *does* it, with a stubborn heart and a high hand. Such a character "is an abomination" *amongst* men; and he is "an abomination *to* men." He is so, as a matter of course, *to the godly*—whose minds are one with God's, and whose "hearts are right with Him." And he is so even to men in general, on the principles of that conventional morality, which it is found necessary to maintain, in order to the union and the well-being of society; for his pernicious influence is felt on the very bonds of social order. And were his principles and example followed, all would be mutual jealousy, distrust, injury, anarchy.

Verse 10. "If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small."—This also has the aspect of a truism—or at least of a very simple and self-evident truth. But simple truths are often the most important and useful: and such is this when duly weighed in its bearings.

We have seen (v. 5) that *true wisdom* is *strength*.—Religion, when it occupies with presiding influence the mind and heart, will impart this strength *in adversity*. A man's strength—the vigour of his principles, *is tried and tested* by adversity. It is only then he is put to the proof. A tree or a house may stand firm in the calm and the sunshine, and to the eye present every appearance and promise of immovable stability; but when the clouds gather, and the tempest raves, the one may be uprooted and the

other laid in ruins. What was said cruelly and unjustly of Job, is but too frequently verified in human experience—"Now it has come upon thee, and thou faintest; it toucheth thee, and thou art troubled."—Further, *in ourselves*, we have no strength to bear adversity aright; and it is when a man is made to feel this—to feel, by his "*fainting* in the day of adversity," that "his strength is small," that he becomes truly strong, by being led to rely more on a power above his own.\*—Adversity thus contributes, among other benefits, to the deepening of humility,—producing diffidence of ourselves, and confidence in God; while the measure of spiritual vigour,—the power of genuine principle—is drawn out and made apparent, for the advantage and encouragement of others.

We must beware of self-reliance. *Boasted* strength will ever be found weakness—ever, in the day when the trial comes, inefficient. Thus was it with Peter. He *thought* his strength great. O! there was not any thing for which it was not adequate. He was fit for every emergency. Nothing could shake, nothing could daunt him. Yet he "*fainted* in the day of adversity," and learned that "his strength was small." And the lesson, though dearly learned, was of eminent use to him all his days; and the record of it has been of use to many a soul since. Let us learn to place our reliance on the Lord. While in Him we have "*righteousness*," in Him too we must have "*strength*." All is from His infinite fulness.†

The two following verses bring before us *an important duty* and *considerations enforcing it*:—"If thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death, and those that are ready to be slain; if thou sayest, Behold we knew it not; doth not he that pondereth the heart consider it? and he that keepeth thy soul, doth not he know it? and shall not he render to every man according to his works?"

The duty directly enjoined is evidently that of *taking part with the oppressed*. The case supposed and described

\* See 2 Cor. xii. 9, 10.

† Comp. Isa. xl. 28—31.



is clearly that of a fellow-creature standing exposed to death, from unrighteous oppression, from false accusation, from malicious prosecution, or from persecution for conscience sake. And the duty incumbent upon us in such a case, whatever be its variety, is that of doing all that lies in our power to deliver such. We may by various causes be tempted to refrain from the discharge of this important duty. But it clearly comes under the comprehensive law of love:—"Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." We may dread the vengeance of the imperious and self-willed despot, or the selfish and partial magistrate, or the unjust judge, or the interested and vindictive private prosecutor. We may be tempted by indolence, that cannot be troubled; by selfishness, that says, It is none of my business; by avarice, that shrinks from risk of loss. But let all such excuses be well weighed. They may serve to suppress the demands of conscience *now*, but they will not stand in the judgment.

The spirit of the duty may be illustrated by a few Scripture examples.—*Obadiah* fulfilled it, when, at the peril of his life, he took part with the prophets of Jehovah against Ahab and his bloody queen—hiding them from persecuting violence, and providing them with the means of life, when all the resources of royal power and fury were astir to discover and destroy them.—*Jonathan* fulfilled it, when he placed himself between his exasperated father and the unjustly pursued, the innocent David,—exposing himself, for the sake of his unoffending friend, with noble generosity and self-denial, to the unnatural execrations of an unreasonable and vengefully jealous parent, and to the point of the madman's javelin.—*Esther* fulfilled it, when, to save from impending massacre and extermination her own people, treacherously sold to the cruel caprice of the haughty, unprincipled, and mean-spirited Haman, she ventured into the presence of the king, uninvited, at the hazard of his fitful wrath and of her head, saying—"If I perish, I perish."—The *midwives of Egypt* fulfilled it, when on the ruthless edict of Pharaoh having gone forth to cast all the male children of the

Israelites into the Nile the instant they were born, these women, "fearing God," disobeyed the royal mandate, and saved them alive.—*Ebedmelech the Ethiopian* fulfilled it, when taking part with the persecuted Jeremiah against the princes of Jerusalem that had accused him to king Zedekiah and demanded his life, and, when the king himself had given him up into their hands from pusillanimous dread of their power,—he went in boldly to the royal presence, protested against the prophet's accusers, charged them with wrong, obtained an order for his release from the dungeon into which they had cast him, and himself executed the order.—*Saul's guards* fulfilled it, or acted at least in the spirit of it, when they disobeyed the command of their master to fall upon and slay the priests of the Lord—an order of most monstrous iniquity; while the time-serving, ungodly, and blood-thirsty Doeg violated it most flagrantly by instant compliance.—*Aquila and Priscilla* fulfilled it, when for Paul's sake "they laid down their own necks," jeopardizing their own lives for the preservation of his.

It was in the full spirit of this lesson that all the measures were prosecuted for effecting the termination of the execrable system of slavery with all its horrors of unrighteousness and deadly cruelty; and it is in the spirit of the lesson still, that all possible means should be put in operation for accomplishing the abolition, throughout the world, of the accursed traffic in human flesh, and the breaking of every yoke, that the oppressed may go free,—that the "drawn unto death may live."

The condition of *sinners* may be regarded as here very aptly set forth. They are "drawn unto death"—*seized*, or *apprehended* for death, and "ready to be slain:"—and the death to which they are doomed,—O how unutterably fearful!

But you may naturally meet me with an objection here. In *their* condition there is *no* injustice; *no* unrighteous and cruel oppression. The sentence of death under which they lie is a *divine* sentence—in perfect accordance with all the principles of equity:—the sword with which they are

“ready to be slain” is the sword of divine justice itself. They deserve to die the death. To attempt to prevent it would be to arrest the hand of God. Ought not divine, and therefore unimpeachable, justice to have its course? The objection—otherwise irresistible—God has himself removed. Justice, infinite justice, had all its claims acknowledged and fulfilled on Calvary. On the ground of the sacrifice there offered,—the atonement there made,—the God of justice and mercy has called on sinners to accept pardon, in the name and for the sake of his Son. His call comes with authority. It is a command. It is in virtue of the satisfaction of justice in the atonement of Christ, that *we ourselves enjoy our own* deliverance from the death and destruction to which, in common with all, we were devoted. And the very same authority that commanded us to believe and be saved, enjoins on us to be agents in attempting the rescue of others. O! what should we not be ready to do, to sacrifice, to suffer, for such an end!—to effect such a rescue!

Turn we now to the *considerations here enforcing the duty*:—

1. It is a duty of which the very *nature ought to render it agreeable*. It is a duty of BENEVOLENCE. It ought, in every case, to be a pleasure to *have*, and to be able to put in operation, the means of doing good—and in a special manner, when the good is, not temporal and secular merely, but spiritual and eternal. Some duties, even of benevolence, are of a mingled character, partly pleasant, partly painful. There are at times contending, or seemingly contending interests;—so that, when we are doing good to one, we are not sure what the possible effects may be to others. But in the present case there is no such apprehension—no drawback. It is *all* pleasing. By the conversion of a sinner, the sinner himself is infinitely benefited; and what but benefit can accrue to any one else? Benefit to *him* is benefit to all who come within the sphere of his influence. There is no possible result but blessing. In delivering *one* who was “drawn unto death and ready to be slain,” we raise

up an agent for the deliverance of more. The benefit spreads,—spreads *around*; spreads *onwards*. The rescue of one may be the rescue of thousands; and to individuals, to families, to circles of kindred, to neighbourhoods, to cities, to kingdoms, to the world, it is *all* benefit,—all blessing; blessing for time, and blessing for eternity.—Still, notwithstanding all this, we are in danger of being tempted to the neglect of this duty. Let us bear in mind therefore—

2. That we have *an account to render to God of the manner in which we have fulfilled it.*

This is evidently the main point in the various awakening questions of the twelfth verse:—“If thou sayest, Behold we knew it not; doth not he that pondereth the heart consider it? and he that keepeth thy soul, doth not he know it? and shall not he render to every man according to his works?” These questions all go to impress our minds with the light in which even the guilt of *forbearing to succour* and to seek the deliverance of the *wronged* and *oppressed* appears in God’s eyes:—and how much more heinous must the guilt appear to Him of leaving *fellow-sinners without even an attempt* to rescue them, to *perish for ever!*

The blessed God has shown His estimate of the worth of human souls, and the value of salvation,—by the ransom He has paid for them. How criminal in His sight must be all *indifference!* What an affront to Him, to affect to make light of an object on which He has impressed, by the whole scheme of redeeming grace, in the incarnation, obedience, sufferings, and death of His Son, so high a value! We *dare* not plead *indifference* with Calvary before our eyes!—with the testimony there borne—borne by the infinite God, in the tears, and agonies, and blood of Immanuel, to the sinfulness of sin, to the fearfulness of the perdition to which it has doomed the sinner, and the unutterable preciousness of deliverance and life!—The expression here used might be interpreted as that of *indifference*—“Behold we *knew* it not!” intimating that they cared not to know it, —were at no pains to find it out. But the plea of indifference, on the part of a professed *child of God*, would be

doubly inconsistent and strange. It would imply at once a *supercilious disregard of the revealed judgment of God*, and the *absence of all right impression of the worth of his own soul*; for such an impression it is impossible for any one to have, who feels not for the perdition of *other* souls as well as of his own. No sinner *can* be in a state of salvation himself, and think, and talk, and act with a spirit of cold-blooded heartlessness and unconcern, about that of his fellow-men!

But we *cannot*, at the bar of God, plead *ignorance*. We cannot plead it with regard to the worth of salvation, when God has, both by word and action, so plainly and impressively declared it; so neither can we plead it as to *the fact of others requiring it*. Many cases of oppression and wrong, of suffering and danger, may exist around us, without our “knowing” them, or being able, by any pains of ours, to discover them. But to say—with regard to the guilt and misery, and exposure to perdition, of the mass of mankind among whom we daily live and move,—“Behold I knew it not,” would be, and could not but be, the utterance of a *lie*,—an unblushingly presumptuous falsehood. To live anywhere on earth, where there are human beings, and not to know it, is impossible:—to live in a city like this, teeming with every variety of ungodliness to be found out of hell, and pretend not to know it, would be a plea only to be accounted for by the loss of reason. Thousands are perishing at our very doors, under our very eye, “without Christ, and without hope!” We see it; we *know* it. The frequency of it is so great,—the sight of it is so constant, that we are in danger of becoming so familiar with it as to lose all impression of the fearful fact. Against this we need to watch. But ignorance can never be our plea.

Further, every plea by which we would vindicate or palliate neglect, would argue *ingratitude to God for his kindness and grace to ourselves*. This seems to be the spirit of the expression—“*He that keepeth thy soul, doth not he know it?*” When applied to the case immediately referred to by Solomon—the case of temporal life exposed to hazard from malice, oppression, or persecution—the case of men

thus “drawn unto death and ready to be slain,”—the expostulation, (taking the word *soul* in its frequent application to *animal life*) has its full spirit:—“He that keepeth *thy* life,”—sustaining it every moment, guarding it from the approach of ten thousand dangers,—without whom you could not draw a breath, and without whose bounty and beneficence life would be a curse instead of a blessing,—“doth not He know it?”—know thy unfeeling neglect of the life of thy fellow-men? And “who maketh thee to differ?” Could not He at once reverse your respective circumstances? And how would you feel, and how would you wish, and what would you expect, were your circumstances theirs, and theirs yours? And has not God, by the law of mutual love, made you mutual guardians of each other’s lives and well-being?—And is it becomingly grateful to Him who is the God and the guardian of your life, in whose hand your breath is, and from whom comes everything that in the slightest measure contributes to life’s enjoyment, to be thus heartlessly unconcerned about the lives of others?—Let Christians apply the expostulation to *higher interests*. The life of your *souls* is in God’s hands. He has given it; He sustains it. In Him you have your *spiritual* as well as your animal being, your heavenly as well as your earthly life. Is there, then, anything like becoming gratitude to the author and sustainer of that immortal life, when you are listless and heedless about souls that are dying and dead around you?—Remember the answer of God to the sullen question of the first murderer, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” “The voice of thy brother’s blood crieth unto me from the ground.” Remember too, that next to the murderer who directly takes away life, is the man who, with the means of life in his possession, suffers his fellow-creature to die. Remember still further, that this is true of the soul as well as of the body; true with an emphasis proportioned to the superior value of the soul’s life to that of the body,—of the eternal to the temporal.

Finally, mark the *principle* on which the judgment of the great day will be conducted:—God will “*render to every man according to his works.*” This implies, that *by their works* the

*principles* of men shall be *tested*; and thus the two great classes separated from each other,—those who are placed on the right, and those who have their station on the left hand:—those who believed, and loved, and feared God, being proved to have been under the influence of these principles, by the “work of faith, the labour of love, and the patience of hope.” And of all descriptions of works, none of the least distinctive of state and character will be *such* works as we have been describing; and foremost in rank the all-important work of *caring for the souls* of others. If *this* is not to be a distinguishing criterion, what else will? How, then, shall we find our place on the right hand of the Judge, if we have taken no interest in such matters?—if we have allowed souls to perish around us, without any concern to save them?—if we have failed to do either the much or the little that was in our power?—Have we not reason to put the question to ourselves, “with fear and trembling,” whether will He whom we call Master and Lord in that day own us as his?—“*Doth not He consider it?*”—Yes; and we have seen the light in which He *does* consider it. O remember what He who is to be the Judge hath done for souls! And think how heavy, in His estimation, must be the guilt of neglecting them, and leaving them to perish! What evidence can they possibly produce, in vindication of their professed faith in him, who, in this essential point, so sadly fail of resemblance to him? Can *they* be Christ’s, that leave souls to perish, when for souls Christ shed his blood? Can they be owned as disciples of Him who came “to seek and to save the lost,” who can allow the lost to remain in their lost estate, with hardly a yearning wish or a faint effort for their recovery? It implies also that while the whole of the glory and blessedness of heaven will be the gift of *grace*, the Father will testify His love to the Son and satisfaction in His work, by proportioning the honour He confers for His sake to the amount of faithful service done to Him by those on whom the honour is bestowed. And that amount will be estimated, not *absolutely* but *relatively*—relatively to the amount of talent, opportunity, and means; so that, in many instances, the pro-

portions will not be according to what *appeared to men*, but according to the righteous measure of *divine knowledge*. Thus “many that are first shall be last, and the last first.” Ought we not then to be emulous to abound in acts of faithful and devoted service to our divine Master? Is it right in any servant of His, to satisfy himself with as much only as may just serve to prevent his being rejected? Would not the very exercise of a principle thus ungenerously selfish, be sufficient of itself to ensure, or at least to warrant his rejection? Should we not be solicitous to be able to say—“Thy pound hath gained *ten* pounds?”—not only not to wrap it in a napkin and let it lie unimproved altogether, but to put it forth to the best possible advantage for the credit of our Master and his cause?—And ought we not as a church, collectively as well as individually, to be zealous of good works; and to “consider one another,” to stimulate to their multiplied performance?—that thus we may be mutually “helpers of one another’s faith and joy,” and contribute to brighten the gems of each other’s crowns in the day of the Lord?



## LECTURE LXXIV.

PROV. XXIV. 13—22.

“My son, eat thou honey, because it is good; and the honeycomb, which is sweet to thy taste: so shall the knowledge of wisdom be unto thy soul: when thou hast found it, then there shall be a reward, and thy expectation shall not be cut off. Lay not wait, O wicked man, against the dwelling of the righteous; spoil not his resting place: for a just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again: but the wicked shall fall into mischief. Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth; and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth; lest the Lord see it, and it displease him, and he turn away his wrath from him. Fret not thyself because of evil men, neither be thou envious at the wicked. For there shall be no reward to the evil man; the candle of the wicked shall be put out. My son, fear thou the Lord and the king; and meddle not with them that are given to change: for their calamity shall rise suddenly; and who knoweth the ruin of them both?”

A COMPARISON is, in the first two verses, instituted between objects of *natural* and *spiritual taste*, and *natural* and *spiritual benefit*.—God is good. His benevolence appears in this, among other ways, that in the provision made for us in temporal things, He does not, by any rigid law, prohibit the use of all but what is necessary to life and health. There are many things gratifying to taste, and sight, and smell, of which such necessity cannot be affirmed. And from these, when used in moderation, and in the spirit of gratitude and dependence, we are not interdicted. We may eat “*honey*,” not only because it is “*good*,” or nutritious, but also because it is “*sweet*.” We must not forget, however, that honey is *both*; for in regard to both, the comparison appears to be designed. Canaan abounded in honey; and it was used, not only as a luxury to the palate, but as an article of diet. “Butter and

honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good," Isa. vii. 15. "*Butter*" is not considered as the proper import of the original word here. It means thickened or curdled milk, which is "still a favourite article of food in Syria, Arabia, and the neighbouring countries: and, when mixed with honey, is exceedingly agreeable to the taste."\* And that "*honey*" was used as an article of diet, and an accompaniment to other kinds of food, we learn from an incident on a most interesting occasion—when Jesus appeared to the disciples after his resurrection:—"While they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, Have ye here any meat? And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an *honey-comb*," Luke xxiv. 41, 42.—In the reference to "*honey*" and "*the honey-comb*," then, we have the two ideas of *pleasantness* and *nutritiveness*. The comparison follows—"so shall the knowledge of wisdom be unto thy soul."

There are some men who might as well, for all the use they make of them, have been without minds. Their mental powers lie dormant. Their enjoyment is all in what is sensual and frivolous. But the experience of such fools no more proves that general knowledge imparts no pleasure, than instances of palates which have lost their relish can prove *honey* not to be *sweet*. The cultivation of the mental faculties, and their employment in the acquisition of knowledge, is a source of pure and exquisite pleasure. It is so in regard to general and scientific knowledge, how much more so in regard to *divine knowledge*,—the knowledge of those truths which divine inspiration has been given to communicate, and divine power has put forth in miracle to confirm!—The *truth* of the comparison presupposes for its ascertainment, the existence of a *spiritual taste*. Spiritual things are "spiritually discerned;" and the spiritual perception of their excellence imparts a pleasure to the soul, of which no power of human sophistry can ever deprive it. A man whose palate is in a healthy condition, and who has tasted honey, can never be argued out

\* Henderson.

of the conviction of its sweetness. You may reason with him to the end of his days; but he will die in the conviction that *honey is sweet*. So it is with the soul that has received "*the knowledge of wisdom*," that has once tasted the sweetness of spiritual discoveries, and of those spiritual enjoyments to which the faith of them introduces. *Experience* is more than all argument;—"more than all the atheists in the world with their sophistry, and all the profane with their banter."\*—And the relish, once felt, produces a growing desire. He who relishes sweetness, having tasted honey, will long for it again. So the sweetness of divine knowledge will quicken the liking for it, and the eagerness for more.† The soul having extracted a little of the sweetness of the word of God,—of the "*honey from the rock*,"—will long, with a keener relish, for a larger portion;—will long for a progressive acquaintance with its rich and varied contents; in their relative bearings, in their beautiful harmony, in their holy and heavenly influence.—And such progress, while pleasant, is *profitable* to the soul. Its practical effects are most precious. It promotes spiritual growth,—the nourishment and the healthful exercise of all the principles and affections of the divine life.

There is one point in which the comparison fails. "*Honey*" is only good in moderation. If its sweetness tempt to the excessive use of it, it becomes both nauseous and hurtful.‡ But this is not true and never can be true, of "*the knowledge of wisdom*"—the knowledge of God's truth. It never can be found sickening the mind, and producing nausea and rejection. The maxim of all in possession of it will be—a maxim held the more strongly the more abundant has been the acquisition,—"*The more the better*."—"Surely there is a *reward*." There is a *present* reward; a reward of present enjoyment, present benefit, present blessing; not the reward of the man who takes honey to excess,—whom it cloy and sickens, and whose constitution it injures; but the reward

\* Henry.

† Comp. Psa. xix. 7—11; cxix. 103, 97, 47; Jer. xv. 16.

‡ See chap. xxv. 16, 27.

of spiritual pleasure and spiritual prosperity, in due proportion to the amount of acquirement. And there is a *future* reward:—"Thine expectation shall not be cut off." This may refer, indeed, to present enjoyment and present benefit. The "expectation," in this respect, can never go beyond the reality; the reality will ever be found to exceed the "expectation." But the "expectation" may be regarded as connected with *eternity*; with the consummation of the divine life in heaven, as well as with its commencement and progress on earth. *That* "expectation shall not be cut off," when every other shall.

Verse 15. "Lay not wait, O wicked man, against the dwelling of the righteous; spoil not his resting place." This is an admonition to evil men to beware of all oppression and persecution of the good. The language is evidently not to be confined to unrighteous infliction on account of particular crimes charged, of which the accused are innocent; but extends to, and especially means, the oppressing and evil-entangling those who are "the excellent of the earth," on account of their very excellence,—as bearing testimony against and condemning the world.

"Spoil not *his resting-place*." Thus is his dwelling designated. It is the abode of love and peace, of quietness, and holy harmony and domestic joy. It is the place of his family altar, around which are poured out the social devotions of a united and affectionate group, in tender and blessed mutual sympathy, the sympathy of nature and of grace.—Intrude not, with unhallowed foot, and ruthless hand, on this abode of piety and love—this chosen resting-place of the affections—this habitation of the God of the families of Israel. Disturb not, with the voice of cursing and bitterness, the "melody of joy and salvation" that is heard in the "dwelling of the righteous." The reason is assigned in next verse—"For a just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again: but the wicked shall fall into mischief."

It is quite clear that "*falleth*" here means falling into *calamity*. Were there nothing else in proof of this, the antithesis between the two parts of the verse would suffice to

show it. The sentiment of the verse is, that how often soever the righteous may thus fall by the hand of man, God is still with him, and he shall recover again. There are in Scripture many delightfully encouraging statements of the same general truth;—full of comfort to God's people, and full of fearful admonition to their enemies.\* Even in the very midst of temporal sufferings, there is a sustaining buoyancy in genuine principle. It rises, like the life-boat, over the billows of tribulation. It may seem, at times, as if actually whelmed by them, but it emerges again with noble energy, and braves, and buffets, and rides out the storm! Such principle is of God. He inspires it. He exposes it to the trial. He enables it to bear up and to triumph.

But I must not pass from these verses without observing how miserably they have been misapplied and abused. The *falling* has been interpreted of falling into sin; and the words have often been so quoted. They have been applied to the doctrine of *final perseverance*; and as meaning that, how frequently soever, and even how grossly soever, the true believer may fall, he can never finally fall away, so as to be lost. It is easy to give such a statement an aspect of plausibility, and to weave it nicely into the tissue of the orthodox system. But in the Word of God things are in no instance represented in such a light; and it is wrong so to use the language, even in the way of accommodation. As for *argument* in support of any doctrine, it should never be forgotten—though it too frequently is—that there can never be aught of the nature of argument or proof in any passage, further than as that passage is used in the precise sense it was intended by the Holy Spirit to bear. It is not *words*, but *sentiment*, that can have any weight whatever in the way of evidence: and arguments that are founded on a different sense from that which the words were designed to express, have in them just—*nothing*. They are literally *words and nothing more*.

\* Job v. 17—19: Psalm xxxiv. 15—22; xxxvii. 23—25, 39, 40: Mic. vii. 5—10: 2 Cor. i. 8—10; iv. 8—12.

The application of the language to which I now allude is mischievous in the extreme. Everything must be so that holds out the slightest encouragement to confidence and ease of mind under even one fall into sin; much more under repeated, under many such falls. There is nothing of this kind, I again affirm, in the Bible. When sin has been committed, all *there* is warning and alarm. The order to the man of God then is:—"Cry aloud, spare not; lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins." Nowhere is there anything to be found that can be interpreted into an assurance of safety, how often soever they may fall. Whatever is there said to preserve against *despair*, is said in such a way as to forbid *presumption*. I can imagine no state of mind more antichristian and delusive than that of the professor who gets himself settled down in the conviction that however often he falls, he cannot finally fall away. His confidence rests on a sufficiently manifest, though alas! too imposing a fallacy. It supposes a man to have ascertained to a certainty his being in a state of grace, *independently of present evidence*. "*Once in grace, ever in grace*," may, in a certain sense, express a Bible truth; but *so applied*, there is not a grosser or more pernicious *anti-Bible* error. Of present life there must be present evidence. It would be a strange way of proving a tree to be now alive, to enumerate the crops it had borne in former years. To prove it *now* alive, you must show us the fruit it bears *now*. In like manner, it will not prove a man to be one of God's family, to show how good he *once was*. The question forces itself on notice—*What is he now?* We have just as good a right to conclude from what he is now, when he is falling into sin, that what he was before has been appearance only and a delusion, as others can have to conclude from what he formerly was, that what he is now is only a temporary backsliding. And in the former conclusion there is less—much less of danger than in the latter. Than the latter, indeed, the devil could not suggest a more ruinous. Every fall into sin should give rise to serious and deep

searching of heart,—to self-suspicion,—to humiliation, and confession, and fear,—to the tears and prayers of a broken and contrite spirit. And yet, strange to say, the words have even been improved upon, to render them, as is imagined, still more systematically orthodox, but in reality so much the more pernicious in their tendency and effects:—“the just man falleth seven times *in a day*, and riseth up again.” O let professors, when they have fallen into sin, instead of indulging in a delusive self-complacency, and unwarrantable and presumptuous confidence in “former signs of grace,”—tremble at their peril, which is imminent. Let them call to mind the Lord’s own words—“Thine own wickedness shall correct, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee: know therefore, and see, that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord God of hosts,” Jer. ii. 19. “Remember whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent,” Rev. ii. 5. “The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, *Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity*,” 2 Tim. ii. 19. “Wherefore, giving all diligence, add to your faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness, charity. For if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: for *so* an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,” 2 Pet. i. 5—7, 10, 11.

Perhaps the words which follow, or the admonition contained in them, are to be connected by a natural association with the close of verse sixteenth—“but the wicked shall fall into mischief.” No doubt the ultimate reference of the language is to the final and irremediable “mischief” into which the wicked shall fall, when the righteous shall have his reward, and reap the fulness of his believing expectation. But the wicked persecutor may “fall into mischief” *now*: he

may be brought, by the providence of God, and that too even by means of his violence against God's people, into circumstances of trial and calamity. And when such happens to be the case, the admonition suited to his case is here addressed to those righteous, who had been the object of his rancour and violence:—"Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth; and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth." Such is the propensity of our corrupt nature. Had not our nature fallen from its original innocence,—had it not "left its first love,"—"enemy" would have been a word unknown; for it expresses a state of feeling which no need would ever have existed of a term to indicate. There would have been no doing of wrong, and therefore no resenting of it. But multiplied, alas! are the wrongs done; and many, and often strong, are the temptations to both the feeling and the act of vengeance. The injunction in this verse is, in the highest degree, *spiritual*. It condemns the *inward feeling* of satisfaction at the fall of an enemy, even when we have in no way contributed to bring it about. Though we should not actually, and with our own hand, avenge an injury,—being aware how express and peremptory the precepts are against that; and while, for the same reason, in order to keep our character clear among men from the imputation of a resentful spirit, we carefully conceal our feelings,—we may yet be secretly, within the privacy of our own bosoms, cherishing the very feeling, which we abstain from uttering or putting into act. We may be inwardly delighted on learning that our enemy has met with what we cannot but think, and call to ourselves, well-merited retribution. So it must not be. Never must we in this spirit say within ourselves,—“Ah! so I thought: no more than I have been looking for and desiring might come.” The reason is in the next verse:—"Lest the Lord see it, and it displease him, and he turn away his wrath from him." The import of this evidently is—lest the tokens of God's displeasure, which would have come on thine enemy, should be transferred to thyself; lest thou, instead of he, should be made to bear them. On this case observe—



1. When we thus inwardly rejoice—our joy is the very spirit of revenge; and our abstaining from actual and open retaliation is thus shown to have arisen from no proper *principle*, but to have been dictated by considerations themselves of a selfish character; or at least by some self-deceiving distinction between doing the thing with our own hand, and being gratified in seeing it done for us;—two things which, in the principle of them, are the very same—for God looks to the *heart*.

2. Solomon cannot possibly intend to intimate, as a motive to prevent our rejoicing in the fall of an enemy, that thereby we may turn away his calamity, and arrest the hand of God from inflicting it; because this, it is clear, would be still the very same spirit. It would be rejoicing in the continuance of the divine displeasure, and taking care to avoid whatever would remove it. This would evidently be to suppose him making the very gratification of the spirit of vengeance in one way, the consideration by which it is restrained from giving itself indulgence in another,—the very gratification of the temper prohibited, the motive to its suppression.

The frequency with which the counsel of the next verse is repeated, is well fitted to impress on our minds the strength of the tendency existing in our fallen nature to the evil reprehended,—and the consequent need for unceasing vigilance against it. O! it is a sad tendency! Only in an apostate and sinful nature can it ever be found;—the tendency to prefer prosperity *without* God, to adversity *with* Him; to look with an enviously wistful eye to the “purple and the fine linen, and the sumptuous fare” of “the rich man;”—and to forget, in the contemplation of his destitution and nakedness, the ample and blessed reversion of the poor and afflicted Lazarus.

And what is the reason assigned for the suppression of all envious feelings and desires?—It is ever substantially the same: (v. 20.) “For there shall be no reward to the evil man; the candle of the wicked shall be put out.” We are thus always carried forward to *the end*. O! what is the “light” of that worldly prosperity,—what is its worth—

which is so speedily to be quenched in darkness? How much better to go through darkness to light, than to go through light to darkness! How much better to pass through a trial of fire to a "wealthy place," than to pass through "a wealthy place" to the "fire that never shall be quenched!"—"The candle (or lamp) of the wicked shall be *put out*." His light—that is, whatever contributed for the time to spread a temporary joy through his heart and his habitation, shall be *extinguished for ever*. At the very moment when the light of God's people shall rise in all its pure and unfading splendour,—at the very moment when their "day dawns and their day star arises,"—the sun of the wicked's earthly glory and earthly joy shall go down in unending night. But to the righteous,—“the Lord shall be their everlasting light, and their God their glory!”

Verses 21, 22. "My son, fear thou the Lord and the king; and meddle not with them that are given to change: for their calamity shall rise suddenly; and who knoweth the ruin of them both." There are some words of general import which are susceptible of application to different objects with modified amounts of that import. Of this description is the word "*fear*," which is here applied to *Jehovah* and to *human rulers*:—"Fear thou *the Lord and the king*." The word expresses the general idea of *reverence*,—or of *holding in awe*. God is to be feared according to the nature and authority of His government, kings according to the nature and authority of theirs:—God supremely; kings subordinately:—God as the source of all power; kings as holding theirs of God, and responsible to Him for the use they make of it:—God for His character, as well as for His authority; kings simply as the representatives of power—their personal character being, not seldom, anything but venerable:—God with a fear ever associated with the love of complacency toward all that He is; kings with a fear with which such love can be blended only in cases where the personal character admits of it,—love being out of the question where there is nothing of the amiable.

The connexion of the two fears in the passage before us is

evidently intended to impress the one by the other:—If you fear God, fear the king. God, whom you are bound supremely to fear, and whose fear should produce obedience to His will, has enjoined the fear of earthly rulers:—so that a failure in the fear due to *them* becomes a violation of the fear due to *Him*.

I need hardly say, that by *the king* we are to understand the *government of the country*. It may be monarchical, or it may not. We are by no means to look upon such expressions as this, in Scripture, as attaching the authority of inspiration to one form of government more than to another. Respecting the comparative merits of different forms, the word of God should not be regarded as giving any decision, whether for the kingly, the aristocratical, the popular, or the mixed. The respect, or fear, is due to *the legislative and executive powers*, of whichever description these may be.

It would certainly too be a grievous mistake, were the admonition here tendered against association with those who are “*given to change*,” so interpreted as to condemn and proscribe everything of the nature of *public spirit*. There may, in different countries,—in their different administrations of government and political usages, be many things in which *change* is most desirable and essential. There may be flaws in old systems which require to be rectified; customs that are absurd and injurious, which it is desirable to have exploded or modified; partial and oppressive laws which demand revision and alteration; principles of policy which have become unsuitable to the times and to the advancing character and civilization of a people, which call loudly for amelioration. Such improvements patriotism may render it a subject’s incumbent duty to do what he can to promote;—to use for this purpose all legitimate and constitutional means which he finds accessible for their attainment; and with a zeal, an energy, and a perseverance proportioned to the magnitude and importance of the end in view, as it bears upon the prosperity and well-being of the community,—or the greatest good of the greatest number. It may not only be

lawful, on the great principles of public morality, for a man to desire and seek such *changes*, but his manifest and incumbent duty to labour and make sacrifices for their accomplishment. Valuable changes have thus been effected, at different periods, in our own country; and there is room for beneficial changes still. They are in progress. Great principles of improvement are at work. But we should be on our guard. *All change is not improvement.* Some restless spirits are in danger of identifying the two. The men against whom we are here warned are men of a discontented, unsettled, factious, turbulent, revolutionary spirit; men who can be satisfied with nothing as it is; who, with a mighty conceit of their own wisdom, talk and act as if they thought the world would never be right but under *their* dominion, and boast of what a world it would be, could they but get all their own way. They are such seditious demagogues as keep a country, for any purpose or for none, in a perpetual ferment; whom nothing pleases; who are thankless for the liberty they have, however far surpassing that enjoyed in other nations, because this or that is not entirely to their mind; who look to their real or imaginary grievances, much more than to their many and valuable privileges; who are ever finding dead flies in the precious ointment, that turn all to unsavouriness,—so that even the sweets of the greatest amount of liberty enjoyed by any nation under heaven, would to them be turned to bitterness by whatever little circumstance, in the constitution or administration, not exactly to their mind, should from time to time discover itself. It must be obvious, that some such characters are intended by “them that are *given to change*.”—inasmuch as to be “*given to*” anything means to be *set upon it*, and dissatisfied without it, and ever on the look-out for it; seeking, and therefore sure to find, reasons for it. Every man must admit that all change is desirable that is a change from wrong to right, and there seems to be no reasonable qualification to this but one; namely, that, since it is a rare thing that changes can be effected in the policy of nations without a greater or a less degree of public agitation and dissension, we should always be sure

that the change which we set ourselves to prosecute is of such a nature,—such in the principle of it, or such in the results anticipated from its introduction,—as to warrant for its sake, the incurring of what must always be an evil, the temporary excitation of discordant passions, and the possible risk of more permanent disunion. Such will be the conduct of every reasonable and sober-minded citizen. As for the men who are “*given to change*,”—ever on the hunt after novelties, and reckless of present or future consequences to the peace and well-being of the country, if they can but draw away political “disciples after them,” get themselves the credit of leaders of a party, and make themselves notorious as agitators of the public mind, mere political adventurers;—these are the men whom the people of God will shun, neither imbibing their spirit, nor giving them any countenance. They will themselves, while, as in duty bound, they cherish public spirit, as the spirit of patriotic benevolence,—and while, in such questions as, they are satisfied, involve great public interests, they give all the weight of their influence, actively and zealously, on what they believe to be the side of truth, and liberty, and humanity, and justice,—they will, at the same time, bear in mind the example of that Master whose followers they profess to be, who was “meek and lowly in heart,” firm in purpose and act, but gentle in the manner of its prosecution,—who “did not strive nor cry, nor cause his voice to be heard in the streets.” They will not imitate those who seem as if they thought it the mark of a manly and independent spirit to scorn and vilify all above them, and the higher others rise, to make it a point of honour to slight and traduce them the more; but, at the risk of the contempt and abuse of such, will remember the authority which condemns “speaking evil of dignities,” and while they “*fear God*,” will by that very fear be induced to “*fear*” and to “*honour the king*.”

There is *one* motive by which the conduct enjoined is here enforced. Of all peoples on earth no people were ever so unjustifiable in being “given to change” as were the people of Israel. Even when Jehovah himself was their

king, they were “given to change.” Their very desire of an earthly king over them, like the other nations, arose from their infatuated love of change. They then rejected *Him* from being king over them: and in many instances did they suffer for it. But, when they *had* a king, it became their bounden duty to *fear* him. And in their history, various striking illustrations present themselves of the fulfilment of the words of this verse. The calamity of insubordination and rebellion “*rose suddenly;*” and both leader and led came to overthrow and ruin. And how frequent have been the exemplifications of the same thing in the history of modern Europe!—and never more than within the last half-century. How many aspiring demagogues, who have seemed for a time to get all their own way,—the tide of public favour rising and flowing along with them,—have experienced the instability of that favour, the fickleness of a mob, the sudden mutability of their likings and dislikings; have found themselves overtaken by unanticipated reverses, and have perished in their own ambitious devices:—up to the very throne to-day, and down to the grave to-morrow. Genuine patriots, it is true, there have been who, for their resistance to real tyranny and unrighteous oppression, have bled on the scaffold, and whose death has been their honour. It is not, I repeat, of such that Solomon speaks, but of the devotees of an ambitious selfishness, who bring upon themselves not “the wrath of the king” only, but the wrath of the King of kings:—and *then*, well may it be said—“*Who knoweth the ruin of them both?*”

## LECTURE LXXV.

—◆—  
PROV. XXIV. 23—34.

“These things also belong to the wise. It is not good to have respect to persons in judgment. He that saith unto the wicked, Thou art righteous; him shall the people curse, nations shall abhor him: but to them that rebuke him shall be delight, and a good blessing shall come upon them. Every man shall kiss his lips that giveth a right answer. Prepare thy work without, and make it fit for thyself in the field; and afterwards build thine house. Be not a witness against thy neighbour without cause; and deceive not with thy lips. Say not, I will do so to him as he hath done to me; I will render to the man according to his work. I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; and, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down. Then I saw, and considered it well; I looked upon it, and received instruction. Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: so shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man.”

THE principle laid down in the first of these verses, while it immediately relates to the public exercise of judicial power, and (as we have had occasion more than once to notice, and to show from many express citations from the Old Testament,) is by divine authority strongly and repeatedly urged on judges under the ancient economy,—has obviously, at the same time, a direct and forcible application to other two cases:—to the case of *private arbitration*, and to the *discipline of the church of God*. Every arbiter or referee, in any cause, is by such reference constituted a *judge*, and bound to the honourable and faithful exercise of the judicial function. Departure from this in one iota would involve the twofold guilt of a violation of integrity

and a breach of trust,—of a sin against God and a crime against man. And as to the discipline of the church, the very same law is actually laid down for it, as for the dispensation of justice by civil functionaries.\*

Verse 24. “He that saith unto the wicked, Thou art righteous; him shall the people curse, nations shall abhor him.”—Integrity, honesty, justice, are *virtues of society*, which the men of the world, though themselves without godliness, and regardless of the dishonour done by the violation of them to the divine Lawgiver, are fully competent to appreciate, in regard to their influence on the condition and well-being of civil communities. They will bear with much that is dissolute and vile in the conduct of their rulers. They think little of it. They regard it as if it affected only their *private* characters,—nay, in this respect they are not at all ill-pleased to have the countenance of such high example in what they are inclined to practise themselves; and as to religion, they never give a thought to the question whether they know anything about it or not:—but they are very sensitive as to the violation of the principles of equity in the administration of the laws. When a public man acts a flagrantly unrighteous and dishonest part,—whether he does it under the influence of fear, or self-interest, or avarice, or indolence, or favouritism, or any other misleading principle and motive,—he becomes the object of general detestation. His people, instead of looking up to him with affectionate gratitude and confidence, become alienated from him, and—timidly and secretly perhaps at first, but more and more openly and loudly as they find a responsive feeling in the bosoms of others,—they load himself and his government with bitter execrations:—so that if the man has any feeling, he will read his sin in his punishment, as, amidst spreading and thickening murmurs and imprecations, coming, even though partially on his ear, he trembles on his throne:—for though he may have found that “the king’s

\* Comp. Lev. xix. 15 as a specimen of such passages in the Old Testament, and Jam. ii. 1—9 for the same principle in the New.



wrath is as the roaring of a lion," and that his subjects for a time quailed before it, yet the wrath of a once awakened and vengeful people, roused and united by a sense of common and deep-felt wrongs, is incomparably more fearful.

How pleasing the contrast, verse 25 :—"But to them that rebuke him shall be delight, and a good blessing shall come upon them." *Whence this delight?* From various and obvious sources :—as 1. From the consciousness of having done rightly. He who acts unjustly, treating the wicked as righteous, and the righteous as wicked, *cannot have this*;—the sweetest and richest of inward delights,—infinitely surpassing, in real value and happy influence, all the charms of adulation and flattery. Of all conceivable things, indeed, to a man who has any conscience at all remaining, or any sensibility, praise must be the most cutting and distressing when there is the inward consciousness of its being undeserved, and that it comes out of either ignorant or feigned lips :—2. From the possession of public approbation, affection, and confidence. The attachment of others to him should not be either a man's or a magistrate's supreme *end*. But still, the enjoyment of it is sweet. Few things, indeed, to a mind of sensibility, can be more so. For a monarch not only to be greeted with the assurance by the lip of fulsome flattery, but to see and know by indubitable proofs, that he reigns in the hearts of a devoted and grateful people, must be a spring, to that monarch's bosom, of a "delight" inexpressible :—3. From a sense of divine approbation. Human commendation and attachment little avail any one, unless they are in harmony with this. *God's blessing*,—and that is indeed "*a good blessing*," the best of all,—comes upon the head of the man who, in the firm exercise of right principle, in opposition to all intimidation and to all allurements, to the frown of one and the favour of another, keeps, with unshaken steadfastness, to the dictates of straight-forward truth, and unbending rectitude.—4. From the affection and complacency of all good men,—and the grateful acknowledgments of those whose causes have been carefully, disinterestedly and righteously investigated and de-

terminated:—even those who fail having, notwithstanding, a testimony in their consciences to the soundness of principle and the sincerity of the desire to do right, with which all has been conducted.

This kind of general approbation is strongly expressed in the following verse:—“Every man shall kiss his lips that giveth a right answer.”—It is a truth, established by the history of the world, that a truly conscientious and good ruler, who acts upon principle, and in all things shows that he is seeking his people’s good, will be the object of a warmly loyal attachment, such as would rally that people round him at the risk of life for his protection and that of his throne,—ready to shed their blood, if need be, in his cause. It has been at times, of course, the fate even of such, to be mistaken and misrepresented; and to become for a season the victims of prejudice and alienation most unmerited. But the misapprehensions having been cleared away and the suspicions proved unfounded, the wrong felt to have been done him has but endeared him the more.

Similar will be the attachment of the people to such ministers and counsellors of the crown as “*give a right answer*”—an answer dictated, not by flattery, not by a desire to secure the royal favour to themselves by conforming to the royal likings, but by a sincere regard to right principle and to the national welfare;—that is, public favour will be the lot of the man who, having the royal ear, avails himself of the privilege and the confidence, to give faithful and disinterested counsel. And although royal *fools* (for such there have been) may cast off such men, because they refuse to give counsel against their own convictions, merely to please their masters and keep their places,—yet monarchs even of ordinary principle will respect the conscientious principle that sacrifices interest to fidelity and truth; and on experiencing the happy results, will “kiss the lips that gave a right answer” instead of one time-serving, selfish, and flattering.

And the words certainly involve a pointed condemnation of all the venial and unworthy adulation too often lavished

on wicked men when in power, by sycophant courtiers; by orators, and poets, and party authors; by ministers of state, and alas! by ministers too of the altar of the God of truth!—palliating and excusing vice and injustice,—extolling unreal or questionable virtues,—investing wickedness and licentiousness with a halo of false and illusive splendour,—bestowing on the tyrant or the debauchee the honour and the praise that belong only to the upright prince and to the good man. O how sadly and criminally have human talents and human influence been thus prostrated and prostituted at the shrine of power, in the spirit of selfish venality!—"This proverb," says a judicious expositor, "contains a useful rule for private persons, as well as for rulers. When we are asked an important question, or consulted on an affair of importance, every man will esteem and love us, if we 'give a right answer.' And, that our answer *may* be right, it is necessary that it should be sincere, prudent, and meek. We must not give an answer calculated merely to please the person that advises with us; for that would not be consistent with integrity. We must consider all the circumstances of the case, that we may give a proper and pertinent answer; and we must speak with that meekness which renders wisdom lovely. If our answers to those who advise with us have these qualifications, although they may sometimes be distasteful, because truth compels us to speak things disagreeable, yet they will tend, on the whole, to the advancement of our character:—and our character is no contemptible object, because the goodness of it is necessary for us in accomplishing the great business of life, glorifying God, and doing good to men."\*

There is one question, my hearers, to which, above all others, "*a right answer*" is desirable. The question is that of the jailor at Philippi:—and assuredly he would have kissed those lips that gave him the answer,—the faith of which inspired his own heart and those of his family with "joy unspeakable." It was the right—the *only* right an-

\* Lawson.

swer. It was the answer "given by inspiration of God." The same had come from those lips into which "grace was poured"—the lips of the "faithful and true witness." Sinners, in their infatuation, may wish a different answer. But the "right answer" is the only one that will obtain favour in the end. All who receive that answer, and experience the blessed results, will "kiss the lips" that have given it. But, "whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear"—the *one* answer must be given. It is the answer that points to the "Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." The answer that was the right one to the jailor is the right one to each of you:—"BELIEVE IN THE LORD JESUS CHRIST, AND THOU SHALT BE SAVED." We might give you an answer more in accordance with your spirit of self-righteousness, and worldliness, and pride. You might bless our lips for it, possibly, *now*; but we are fully assured, you would curse them in the latter end.

Verse 27. "Prepare thy work without, and make it fit for thyself in the field; and afterwards build thine house." A large number of proverbial sentiments, and maxims of practical wisdom, are to be found couched in terms taken from particular departments of life and business. Every one at all acquainted with even the ordinary, but frequently very terse and pithy proverbs of our own country, must be aware of this. It is so in the verse before us. The advice thus given, to bring the lands into good heart, and make the estate productive, before we lavish large expenditure upon the mansion, is clearly intended to convey a general lesson. What is it? I answer—One or other of two things.

1. Begin no undertaking, without due forethought and adequate preparation. Let needful calculations be previously made. Look before you. Think what you are doing. See that you have means for going forward and finishing as well as for commencing. Let all be planned and laid out; materials collected or secured; your way clear. This view of the admonition is often too little regarded; and the important principle of it too often violated. Men set about objects of great magnitude with little of either reflection or antici-

pation,—with partial information, inadequate provision, and unascertained resources. All is imposing in the outset, and great expectations are excited. But all comes by and by to a stand; and shame, disappointment, and loss are the result,—their unfinished works remaining to future generations as the memorials of their folly.

2. Let those things which are obviously most important and necessary be done *first*, and the less urgent afterwards. Let not a man *begin business* by building, and expensively furnishing, a fine house. Let the land be first cultivated. Let your business, whatever its nature, be faithfully and diligently minded, and well established, as far as human industry can effect, or human foresight calculate. Be content, in the mean time, with inferior accommodation. There is an ambitious hasting to be great upon little, as well as an eager hasting to make little much, that is deeply reprehensible, because it is injurious to *others* as well as to the speculator himself. A man should have property well realized and secured, before he enters on schemes of expensive building. He must not, with sanguine infatuation, appropriate the very first proceeds of his trade to the erection of *a palace to live in!*

The principle of the general maxim, as one of prudential wisdom, is applicable in other departments than those of worldly business. The man violates it who, in the department of literature or science, undertakes works for which he either has not from nature adequate capacity, or for which he has not adequately endowed himself by preparatory study and information. There is the certainty, in such cases, of a disgraceful failure; and, if others have been made to depend upon his instructions, and he proves himself utterly incompetent to redeem the pledge held out, he becomes chargeable with the injustice and wrong done to them, as well as the butt of ridicule himself.

By the highest of all authorities, Jesus himself, the principle is applied, in the department of *religion*, to the duty and importance of avoiding a *hasty and inconsiderate profession* of it. He wished and warned all to think what they were doing; to

count the cost; to act on the principles of prudential calculation; to consider, whether what they were to obtain by becoming his followers, was, or was not, worth the sacrifices which the step might demand of them. The man who founds a mighty profession on very scanty and imperfect acquaintance with the doctrine he professes, and with the nature and effects of the profession it requires, is like the man who makes a fine show by rearing a splendid mansion, while his fields are not in a condition to support it. Such a man, instead of maintaining his profession *out of his capital*, puts all his capital *into his profession*. There is nothing else. He cannot stand.

The principle of the maxim has also been justly applied to *spiritual knowledge*. "There are first principles which ought in the first place to be well studied, and then we must 'go on unto perfection.' To think of going on to perfection without learning the first principles is as foolish as to think of raising the superstructure of a house without laying the foundation; and to rest in the first principles, is as foolish as to lay the foundation of a house, and then to fancy that our work is all over."\*

Verse 28. "Be not a witness against thy neighbour without cause; and deceive not with thy lips."—So far as *witness-bearing* is concerned, we have had this same subject repeatedly under our notice. It may be an imperative duty at times, painful as it ever must be, to "bear witness against our neighbour." It may be required of us, by our regard to the good of society, to the glory of God, and to the rights of individuals. Our testimony, whensoever we are called and bound to give it, must invariably be according to the strictest truth. But there is, in this verse, something more than this. Not only are we forbidden to bear *false* witness against our neighbour,—we are not to bear witness against him at all, "*without cause*:"—that is, when our unfavourable testimony is uncalled for; when it is not required by any of the considerations mentioned, or even by that of *self-exculpation*,—when we are im-

\* Lawson.

plicated, and our character, reputation, or interest, is at stake, and cannot be vindicated or secured without the crimination of another. The interdiction is violated, when a man, from any improper motive, ultroneously and needlessly, pushes himself forward to offer his testimony,—though fully aware of the results to the party who is the subject of it. If a man is induced to give unfavourable testimony by any selfish or unwarrantable consideration, he transgresses this prohibition. You will at once perceive,—and I trust you will have the impression of it fixed deeply and indelibly in your minds, so that it may duly influence your entire practice,—that the terms apply, directly and forcibly, to all descriptions of *scandal* that consist in the *needless repetition of real evils*. Of this there is a vast and lamentable amount. *Slander* is properly “*false invective* ;” but there may be a great deal of *scandal*, even where there is not an atom of slander. Deem it not enough that the evil you tell of your neighbour is *true*. Still think of the golden rule. Still ask the question, whether, if you are conscious of anything wrong in yourselves, which another knows, you would like the possessor of the secret to bring it into publicity. And, as you feel how decidedly you would deprecate this in your own case, venture not on it in the case of another. Venture not, even in the way of the most confidential secrecy. Keep what you know in your own bosoms. It is best and safest there. In all such matters, proceed on the maxim that a whisper in solitude may one day become the buzz of a public *fama*,—that what is “told in the ear in closets” may be by and by “proclaimed upon the housetops ;” that however unseen you drop the stone into the stillness of the lake, you give thereby the first impulse to a circling and widening wave.

“All very good,” you may say, “as regards friends and neighbours that have done one no wrong, and to whom one owes no grudge. But what of *enemies*, of persons who have slandered and injured *us*?—are we to be schooled and censured for only paying them in their own coin?” The answer is in next verse. It is clear and pointed. Ponder it well :—

“Say not, I will do so to him as he hath done to me; I will render to the man according to his work.”\*

The *general subject* of the following verses (30—34) has been more than once noticed;† but they not only *bear* but *require* repetition,—“line upon line, precept upon precept.” Solomon describes what had come accidentally under his eye. It was a scene of desolation,—not the result of the barrenness of the soil, nor of the violence of the invading foe, but of indolence and neglect. The field which had before been cultivated lay waste; the vineyard, which before had been dressed and productive, was now overrun with every description of useless and noxious weeds. Solomon looked on this scene, and gathered a lesson from it; a lesson to himself, which the Holy Spirit directed him to put on record for all generations:—“Then I saw, and considered it well; I looked upon it, and *received instruction.*” It has been said, and truly said, that “wise men profit more by fools, than fools by wise men: for wise men will learn to avoid the faults of fools, but fools will not learn to imitate the virtues of wise men.” Let us learn from the scene described—

1. How *gradual* may be the approaches of the evils of sloth, while, at the same time, they are *irresistible* in the end. This is the lesson of the thirty-fourth verse. The traveller approaches by degrees. When comparatively at a distance, he appears harmless; but, when he has advanced a certain length, he is discovered to be “*an armed man,*”—all resistance to whom is too late, and consequently vain. Famine, though gaunt, is irresistibly mighty. Who can stand before it? Not the man of habitual sloth. The very habit has the more thoroughly incapacitated him for plucking up any spirit to ward off the final ravages of the frightful enemy. He succumbs, sinks, and dies.

The same lesson is read to us in the case of the field and the garden. It is by degrees that they come to the state of utter desolation and luxuriance in all that is profitless and

\* On the general subject of *retaliation*, see on verses 17th and 18th of this chapter and preceding passages.

† As in chap. vi. 6—11.



hurtful, here described:—but though slowly, it is *surely*. And so surely is the tendency realized in a neglected *business* and a neglected *family*. You may possibly have chanced to see *two* little gardens adjoining each other; the one the garden of the *diligent*—neat, clean, orderly, beautiful, well-stocked and productive; the other that of the sluggard, here so graphically described. Now, as you see the garden without, you may expect to find the family within:—in the one, all clean, and snug, and tidy, and comfortable; in the other, all dirty, and bare, and tattered, and cheerless: and this too, where there is the same amount, or rather the same scantiness of means,—nay perhaps the advantage, in this respect, on the side of the sluggard.

How opposite the feelings produced by these two scenes!—what delight in the one! what disgust in the other! And of one emotion, in contemplating each, we are especially conscious. If circumstances of trial and loss are imagined to come upon the one, how prompt in purpose we feel to help him,—to *keep* him up, or, when he falls, to *raise* him again. His neighbours will unite to stock his garden for him from their own store,—to provide for his children, and to furnish him anew with the means of doing well, and will pray for a blessing upon him. The other will meet with but little sympathy. He will be left to reap the bitter fruit of his own laziness and folly; no eye pitying, no hand helping him.

2. Our souls are committed by God to our own spiritual cultivation. This is no sinecure. They will not thrive themselves. If we would have them “as a watered garden, and as a field which the Lord hath blessed,” we must apply spiritual activity and labour, to stock them with the appropriate graces, affections, and virtues, and to promote the growth and productiveness of them all. We must sow the seed, and seek by prayer the showers of the divine blessing,—the promised influences of the divine Spirit. We must watch over the germination, the springing, the growth, and the fructifying of the seed. Without this all will be stunted and sterile. The noxious and unsightly weeds of sin will spring and luxuriate, and overspread the soil; all growing

that ought not to grow, and nothing growing that should. Ignorance and error,—foolish and sinful imaginations,—all the lusts and passions,—all the thoughts, and words, and acts of vice and wickedness,—will make room for themselves, choking up and destroying everything else. If there be any fruit in the field, it will be “thistles instead of wheat, and cockle instead of barley:”—if any grapes in the vineyard, they will be “wild grapes;”—the “grapes of Sodom, the clusters of Gomorrah,” “grapes of gall, clusters of bitterness,”—while all the under-soil will be fertile only in what is worthless or worse,—in the weeds of foolishness, and the poisons of iniquity and death. A neglected garden is unsightly; but how much more unsightly to the spiritual eye, a neglected *soul!*—a soul left to itself; uncultivated, and unprotected; left to produce what it will, and exposed, by the breaking down of its fences, to the ravages of every passing devourer; “the lion from the bottomless pit wasting it at his pleasure!”

Let us, then, my beloved brethren, attend with unremitting diligence to the fencing and the cultivation of our minds and hearts, in the knowledge, and faith, and love, and holy influence, of divine truth; that so all that is noxious may be repressed and rooted out, and that we may be “filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are, by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.” “Herein,” said Jesus, “is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit: so shall ye be my disciples.” O let us beware of bringing upon ourselves the complaint of Jehovah against his ancient people—who enjoyed so much privilege, but proved so sadly degenerate—fertile in evil, and sterile of good!\* Let us bear in mind, that it is only when we wait for, and “drink in” the rains of divine influence, and “bring forth fruit unto God,” that we can receive an increase of blessing; and that when, in the midst of all means and all advantages, we are, solely through our own listlessness, and indolence, and negligence, in the use and improvement of them, barren and unfruitful,

\* Comp. Isa. v. 1—7.

or fruitful only in evil, we are exposing ourselves to the righteous desertion and curse of God.

Let parents apply the principle to the spiritual instruction of their children. Your families are as vineyards committed to your care and culture. Imagine not that, when left to themselves, they will spontaneously yield good fruit. The experience of all generations reads you an opposite lesson. You must enclose; you must dig, and sow, and water, and watch, and protect the springing blade, till it comes to the ear, and the full corn in the ear. You must train from their earliest germs your tender plants, and guard, and support, and prune them, and clear and manure the soil around them. The incessant care of both parents must be bestowed upon this; and all little enough. They must look for the help and for the blessing of God. O see to it, that the verses before us be not a just description of any of your families,—from your parental negligence, indifference, and sloth. Let every family be as a sacred enclosure for God; fenced in from the blasts and blights of the world, where the “plants of his right hand’s planting” are reared from the seed, for future productiveness.

And it would ill become me to forget,—deeply humbling as the remembrance is, as being associated with the consciousness of great failures, and great, though some of them unavoidable, deficiencies,—that *the Church* is the Lord’s vineyard, and that every separate church of Christ is a section of that vineyard; that ministerial watchfulness, and diligence, and fidelity, and prayerfulness, are required, for its protection from the inroads of Satan, and for its suitable culture, and divinely required fruitfulness. When, through erroneous, unfaithful, speculative, heartless preaching,—by a shunning to declare the whole counsel of God,—by the teaching of doctrine without practice, or of practice without doctrine,—and by the laxity or entire neglect of instituted discipline,—by carelessness in the admission of members, and the want of vigilance over their conduct when received,—by allowing to pass without admonition what ought to be admonished, and retaining that which ought to be excluded,—

any portion of that sacred enclosure becomes overrun with the briars and thorns of conformity to the world from which it ought to be separate, and from which its distinction ought to be apparent to all,—a solemn responsibility may be incurred, and a heavy account may have to be rendered.

And let us look with pity on the vast outfield of the world, both in Christian and in heathen lands. Is it not, on a fearfully extensive scale, what is here described? “It is all grown over with thorns, and nettles have covered the face thereof, and the stone-wall thereof is broken down.” It is overspread, in sad luxuriance, with all the varieties of sin; it is open to the wasteful malignity of the enemy of God and of souls. Instead of being, as it should have been, one great garden of the Lord, it is rank with all that is hateful in His sight. It is the duty of Christians to reclaim this desolation. Jehovah has given to his Son “the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession.” The “desolate heritages” must be brought in. It has been through the criminal indolence and apathy of the church of God, that they have lain so long and so extensively waste. The world, as committed to the care and culture of the people of God, has, alas! for many an age, been “the field of the slothful, and the vineyard of the man void of understanding.” There has been for some time an awakening to a more intelligent view of the relation of the church to the world, and to a sense of the sin and shame of former indolence and neglect. The great duty is now, in no small degree, felt, of clearing away from the face of this apostate earth the “thorns and nettles” of sin and the curse, and bringing the whole into spiritual cultivation and productiveness. O let Christians be more and more, personally and unitedly, diligent in this good work, that so “the wilderness and the solitary place may be glad for them; and the desert may rejoice and blossom as the rose,” Isa. xxxv. 1. Let the prayer of the ancient church be ours: “God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and cause thy face to shine upon us. That thy way may be known upon the earth, thy saving health among all nations.” Psal. lxxvii. 1, 2.

## LECTURE LXXVI.

—◆—  
PROV. XXV. 1—7.

“These are also proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied out. It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honour of kings is to search out a matter. The heaven for height and the earth for depth, and the heart of kings is unsearchable. Take away the dross from the silver, and there shall come forth a vessel for the finer. Take away the wicked from before the king, and his throne shall be established in righteousness. Put not forth thyself in the presence of the king, and stand not in the place of great men: for better it is that it be said unto thee, Come up hither, than that thou shouldst be put lower in the presence of the prince whom thine eyes have seen.”

At this point commences the *fourth* division of this Book, extending to the close of the twenty-ninth chapter.—In 1 Kings iv. 32, it is said of Solomon, in enumerating the particulars of his extraordinary wisdom,—“he spoke three thousand proverbs.” And what he is thus said to have *spoken*, it is evidently designed to be understood, he committed to writing. The full collection of these sententious maxims of wisdom had been kept, it would appear, in the possession of the house of David, or of the kings of Judah. The selection in the preceding part of the Book had been made by Solomon himself. Those which follow were added in the time of good king Hezekiah; by the direction, there is every reason to suppose, of that exemplary prince, for the religious benefit of his people. “The *men* of Hezekiah” stands in the Septuagint translation, “the *friends* of Hezekiah”—meaning, in all likelihood, *Isaiah* and other inspired men. Like the proverbs

which precede, these must be regarded, by their admission into the Jewish canon of Scripture, as having the sanction, not only of the wisdom and experience of Solomon, but of divine authority; and we owe them the same reverential regard as we owe to other parts of God's Word.

The "men of Hezekiah" by whom they were "copied out" were employed, by the providence of God, in doing a service to all future generations. They have added to the precious practical instructions by which we are directed in our conduct on earth, and are trained for the perfection of heaven. Thus are there various kinds and degrees of usefulness in the church of God. Solomon, in selecting and composing these gems of moral and spiritual instruction, was more honoured than those by whom they were merely copied; but the copyists were of eminent service.—And what would have become of the church of God, in ages preceding the invention of the art of printing, but for the labours of scribes, in taking copies of what had been "given by inspiration of God?"

Verse 2. "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honour of kings to search out a matter."—Without entering at large into the interesting subject of the union of manifestation and concealment,—of discovery and of secrecy,—in the divine administration, (which the style of exposition does not allow,) perhaps the following truths may be considered as comprehended in this brief but striking statement—"*It is the glory of God to conceal a thing:*"—

1. Taking it in contrast with the latter part of the verse—"but the honour of kings is to *search out a matter,*"—there is implied the idea that the divine knowledge is universal, perfect, and free from everything of the nature of inquiry, investigation, effort, in the acquisition. His acquaintance with all things is, in the strictest sense, *intuitive*, and, in the strictest sense, *complete*. He requires no "*searching out*" in order to discover anything; nor is it possible to make any addition to His knowledge. The past, the present, and the future are alike before His all-comprehensive mind. He sees all the present. He remembers all the past. He

*fore*-sees all the future. His knowledge is “light without any darkness at all;” and it is light that is equally clear through the immensity of the universe, and through all time and all eternity!

2. The language implies God’s entire *independence and supremacy*, as a part of His glory. He “giveth not account of any of his matters,” further than, in sovereignty, He sees meet to do. He conceals when he pleases. He discloses when he pleases:—“Who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?” and who can demand the disclosure of any one of the secrets of the infinite and independent Mind?

3. The *impenetrable depth* of his counsels is a part of God’s glory. His “judgments are a great deep.” What line of created wisdom can fathom them?—

“Not angels, that stand round his throne,  
Can search his secret will!”

“Canst thou, by searching, find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea.” “O the depth of the riches, and wisdom, and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!” This is fitted to inspire us, His intelligent creatures, with “reverence and godly fear.” In the sovereign secrecy, the unapproachable reservation, the unfathomable mysteriousness of the divine counsels,—in the very requirement that we humbly bow, in adoring submission, where we cannot comprehend, without asking a question, or urging a further disclosure:—in all this, there is something that gives the Creator His proper place. There is in it a sacredness, an awfulness, that makes us feel, as we ought to do, our infinite distance. This is God’s glory.

4. In all God’s most mysterious and incomprehensible ways, He is entitled to entire and undoubting confidence. His very secrecy is a test of principle, and thus one of the means of bringing glory to his name in the exercise of prin-

ciple in our feelings and conduct towards him. Were there no concealment, there would be no trial of faith, *no trust*. And while God brings honour to himself by thus drawing forth the confiding filial love of his children, He lays up glory for his name against the day of future disclosure, when all shall be made plain,—the day of the “revelation of the righteous judgments of God!”

It is His glory, that, after all the discoveries of himself made to us, both in his works and in his word, we yet are constrained to exclaim—“How little a portion is known of Him!” The *little* is full of wonder; but *infinitude* is still in concealment. And even of the vast and complicated schemes of providence and of grace, how much is there, after all we see and all He has told us, respecting which we are still left to say—“The day will declare it!”

“*But it is the honour of kings to search out a matter.*”—The general meaning and spirit of these words, from the position of contrast in which they stand, appears to be, that it belongs not to man, how elevated soever in authority and honour he may be, to assume airs of divinity, and presume to think of imitating the peculiar prerogatives of the supreme Ruler. It is the province of earthly rulers to keep their own place, and, instead of “thinking of themselves more highly than they ought to think,” to “think soberly,” and, in humbleness of mind, to endeavour, in the application of all their powers, to fulfil the ends for which they have been entrusted with their power.

It becomes kings to imitate, in the administration of their government, the *righteousness* and the *mercy* of the divine;—but there are points in which all imitation would be presumption. They must not imitate Him in *intuitive discernment* and *instantaneous decision*; nor must they imitate Him in *profound secrecy* and *impenetrability* of counsel and procedure.

As to the *former*:—it must be the effect of one or other of these things—pride, or vanity, or hasty passion, or indolent remissness. And no one of these is an honour to a prince, but the very reverse. In every case of judgment



that involves the rights and affects the well-being of individual subjects, and in every measure that embraces more extensively the prosperity and happiness of the community, and may either, on the one hand, effectually promote these, or, on the other, expose them to injury or to risk, it is his incumbent duty, and it is his "honour,"—instead of hasty and peremptory decision,—to *search out the matter*; to consider, to consult, to compare advices, to weigh all evidence, on either side, with scrupulous conscientiousness,—laying together, in regard to every public measure, all its various bearings and tendencies, and possible or probable results. *Intuition* belongs only to God; and instant decision can be warrantable only in the case of him who possesses it.

And as to the *latter*:—it too is the result of pride and self-sufficiency,—of the arrogance of royalty. From nothing else can the assumption proceed of studious secrecy, and distance, and elevation, and mystery, into which their subjects beneath them must not presume to pry, or attempt to penetrate;—and the affectation of deciding and acting on grounds that must by no means be known, but wrapt up in the mystery of sovereignty and the haughty reserve of false greatness. Such procedure, considered as the general character of the dealings of royalty, may be dictated by *fear*; but not by attachment nor confidence; nor is it fitted to engender either. The honour of a king, in "searching out a matter," is—to show, in his general procedure, with openness and unreserve, the grounds on which it is founded,—thus manifesting confidence in his people, a desire to show them and to satisfy them of his real regard, while, at the same time, he keeps his place, maintains his legitimate authority, and is unswayed, to the right hand or to the left, by any momentary clamour of popular threatening. *This* is his glory. This gives the most desirable and enviable of all honour to a ruler,—a place in the hearts of his people, —a throne in their affections.

The same principle, it may be observed, applies to *all* in authority, as well as to kings,—whether in the state or in the church; to all magistrates and judges, to all private

arbiters, to masters in reference to their servants, to parents in reference to their children; to pastors of churches, and to brethren entrusted with any matter for investigation. It is at once duty and honour to *search out* everything that comes under their cognizance. The *honour* should ever be regarded as lying in the fairness and impartial justice of the decision, and in the completeness with which it meets every branch and bearing of it, so as to leave no ground for subsequent dissatisfaction and complaint; not in the mere off-hand and summary quickness with which it is dispatched, and by which fools seek to get to themselves the credit of extraordinary perspicacity,—of seeing at a glance through intricacies that would cost others a process of anxious scrutiny.

In the next verse a *comparison* is intended: “*as the heaven for height, and the earth for depth, so the heart of kings is unsearchable.*”

It is quite true, notwithstanding what we have before said, and in perfect consistency with it, that a wise prince will, in regard to some of the measures of his administration, be on the reserve. There are plans which depend on secrecy for their success, and of which the premature disclosure would be the ruin. There may at times be secrets that are confidential between governments, as well as between individuals,—of which the divulging would be a breach of the faith of treaties, and might expose the rights and liberties of other nations to hazard.

I scarcely think, however, had this been the sentiment intended, it would have been expressed in terms so very strong. That “the heart of kings is unsearchable,” and as incapable of being known as the height of the heaven to be measured and scaled, or the depth of the earth to be penetrated,—is surely too strong a mode of expressing the propriety of secrecy, howsoever profound, in regard to some of their measures. As the third verse seems to stand in opposition to the second, I am inclined to think that it is not to be understood as commendatory, or as expressing what is *right* and *ought to be*; but rather as having reference to the generally prevailing character of the monarchs of those days, and of

those eastern countries. They were despots;—their governments absolute, and inimical to everything like popular freedom. Decisions were come to, and sentences pronounced, and both carried into instant execution; persons were seized; property was confiscated; liberty was forfeited; life itself was taken away, without warning, and for reasons which nobody knew, and nobody dared to ask: and complaint was more than unavailing;—it was unpardonable presumption, for which death was lenity. All was hidden, all mysterious; and no one could be sure for an hour what might, amidst the dark intrigues of a despotic court, be impending over him. With public measures, it was the same. Wars were waged; treasures were lavished; blood flowed; for causes which many a time had their origin in personal caprice, or whim, or resentment. The secret depths of the despot's bosom were out of reach.

Should it, on the other hand, be thought unlikely that Solomon, himself a king, should speak in terms so strongly condemnatory of kings in general,—and should it be thought more reasonable, as by many it will, and perhaps justly, that the words are descriptive of the greatly superior difficulties and weighty interests and cares of royalty, to those in all ordinary and more private occupations—I cannot illustrate this view of the subject better than in the language of another:—“The affairs of government are so various and complicated, they have so many designs to carry on, so many mischiefs to obviate, so many opposite tempers of men to consider, and so many difficulties to encounter, that persons in a lower station cannot possibly understand the reasons of a great part of their conduct, or the ends which they have in view. It is therefore presumptuous in subjects to be rash with their censures on the public management. Those who take a liberty to despise dominions, and speak evil of dignities, should be sure that they do not speak evil of those things which they understand not.”

Verses 4, 5. “Take away the dross from the silver, and there shall come forth a vessel for the finer. Take away the wicked from before the king, and his throne shall be estab-

lished in righteousness." Here too is a comparison. As in order to the production of a beautiful vessel, such as "the refiner" would approve and commend, the material of which the vessel is to be made must be purged of its alloy;—so, in order to the general government of a prince being of a nature to prove conducive to the benefit of his people and to the stability of his throne, the wicked must be removed from his presence and from all intimacy with his life and counsels.—How many princes, themselves well-principled and inclined to what is right, have been misled by the influence of profligate and artful counsellors,—especially when their own minds, though rightly disposed, are deficient in vigour and decision of character! They are then easily made the dupes of clever but unprincipled men, who can set measures of the worst and most impolitic kind in lights that are imposing and captivating; and who can not only "make the worse appear the better reason," but by the acts of flattery undermine their better principles and gradually assimilate them to themselves, and bring them to do as they will. Nay, even the very best princes may sometimes be thwarted and weakened, and prevented from carrying out their own measures of wise policy, by the too great ascendancy of certain individuals, both in the state and in the army. David felt this, when he lamented the fall of the murdered Abner, whose death, which had been perpetrated by Joab, he weakly allowed to pass unvisited by the vengeance which the law of God demanded.\*

The sentiment is, as we have before noticed, most false and dangerous, that private or personal character is of little consequence in a prince or in his counsellors;—that what is chiefly to be looked to is, right political principles, with intelligence and firmness to work them consistently and steadily;—that, in a word, public and political character is alone to be minded. Nothing can be plainer than that the principles of private character will infallibly infuse their influence into a man's official and public conduct. Surely we can repose greater

\* See 2 Sam. iii. 39, 40.

confidence in the counsels and procedure of the man whom we know to be under the influence of sobriety, purity, integrity, and piety, than in him who is destitute of all right moral principle, and under the dominion of profligacy, unrighteousness, incontinence, selfishness, and irreligion! The prevention of the corruption of a monarch's principles by the "taking away the wicked from before him," tends both to the prosperity of the people and to the stability of the government. The *example* of the prince contributes to the increase in the community of the "righteousness which exalteth a nation;" and the manifestation of steadfast integrity, and of conscientious solicitude to do all that can be done for the public good, and not for mere personal and selfish ends, attaches the people to the throne. And this attachment is the prince's best security,—as well as his richest earthly reward.

Let us not forget—since we are not ourselves either the possessors or the heirs of thrones, however interested in the characters of those who occupy them,—that there is a *general principle* in the sentiment of these verses, which admits of other applications. That which corrupts princes corrupts the occupants of all the different stations in society as well as them. We have here, as exemplified in the high places of the earth, the apostolic maxim—"Evil communications corrupt good manners." If you would have your children "vessels for the finer;" if you would have the dross and the tin of their native corruption effectually purged away; if you would have them "walking in truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father,"—then must you, as far as lieth in you, "take away the wicked from before them;"—you must keep them from the contaminating contact of the unprincipled and ungodly,—from "the counsels of the workers of iniquity." They may counteract and nullify all your efforts for their moral and spiritual benefit,—and by their perverting influence, "pierce you through with many sorrows."

## LECTURE LXXVII.

—◆—  
PROV. XXV. 8—13.

“Go not forth hastily to strive, lest thou know not what to do in the end thereof, when thy neighbour hath put thee to shame. Debate thy cause with thy neighbour himself, and discover not a secret to another; lest he that heareth it put thee to shame, and thine infamy turn not away. A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver. As an ear-ring of gold, and an ornament of fine gold, so is a wise reprovcr upon an obedient ear. As the cold of snow in the time of harvest, so is a faithful messenger to them that send him; for he refresheth the soul of his masters.”

THERE is a natural enough connection between the first of these verses and the two that precede; in which we have the spirit of vain self-importance and self-sufficiency. “*Hastiness to strive*” is very often the effect of the same spirit. It is touched instantly and to the quick by the slightest surmise,—the most distant rumour—of insult or opposition. It is on fire in a moment. It takes no leisure to inquire or to deliberate. It assumes its ground with rash precipitancy, and without discrimination, either of persons or of circumstances. To the man of this spirit, it is quite enough that some one has insulted him. He instantly takes the field, before he has distinctly ascertained even the facts, far less considered the tactics it is best, or most consistent with duty, to pursue. The consequence of such haste is often what is here described:—“*Lest thou know not what to do in the end thereof, when thy neighbour hath put thee to shame.*”

Allow me, for the sake of illustration, to suppose two or three varieties of this result:—

1. The *hasty* man meets his supposed adversary,—some

word or act of whom has just reached him. He is all full of the fuming pride of offended self-consequence; very big; very wrathful. In this spirit he makes his charge; and finds it is a mere idle unfounded rumour that has come to his ears; that there is actually nothing in it; that nothing of the kind has ever been either said or done; that there is no ground whatever for all his excitement and transport!—How foolish he looks, when his imagined enemy, against whom he has been breathing out the vehemence of passion, all collected and cool, stands wondering at his agitation,—unable to divine what has come over him!—And how is he laughed at for having stirred himself up to all this heat and hurry,—all this violence of emotion—*for nothing!*

2. It turns out that in the cause between him and his neighbour, which he has so hastily taken up, *he is in the wrong*;—that, after all his froth and bluster, truth and justice are clearly on the other side, with all the solid and satisfactory argument; while on his there is little or nothing beyond the noisy and vehement protestations of self-sufficiency, and he is quite unable to withstand the proofs against him,—the verdict of all impartial persons being in favour of his opponent. In this case, he must either, after having his pride keenly mortified, cool down, and own himself in the wrong,—which is the best thing he can do, but far from easy to a man of his temper; or the more he is overpowered by evidence of facts and by sound argument, the more must the sense of conscious defeat, and consequent feeling of inferiority, inflame him to rage; by which he will only render himself the more ridiculous, and give cause of more lasting mortification and shame.

3. The same things are true of a controversial dispute on any subject. Generally speaking, the hastiest and most self-confident is the most likely to fail. Such confidence very often accompanies partial information and superficial and one-sided views. The petulant, consequential disputant “*goes forth hastily to strive,*” in the full assurance that his arguments are such as cannot be resisted, and in the full flush of anticipated triumph,—of victory before the

battle. But objections meet him, of which he had never thought. Arguments are arrayed and urged on the opposite side, such as had never occurred to his own mind, and such, therefore, as he did not at all expect, and cannot refute. I can imagine few situations more full of galling mortification. He is abashed, confounded, stupified. Where he looked for certain victory, he finds humiliating defeat. Where his tongue was to be all eloquence, he is downcast and silent; where he anticipated laurels, he reaps briars and thorns. He lies at the mercy of his antagonist. That antagonist may be spiteful, and take his advantage to the uttermost of his confusion, exposing him at every point. If this is not his fate, it is one still worse. He rises in angry loudness as he sinks in sense and argument; he makes up for the weakness of his reasoning by the strength of his lungs, by vociferous and declamatory dogmatism. And this only brings him the lower; sinks him the deeper in shame;—far deeper, than if he had at once, and candidly, owned his ignorance and precipitation, and given in with a good grace.

It is an important lesson,—that a man should know and feel well his ground, before he ventures into the arena of debate. Even when his cause is *right*, this is necessary. In many cases, it is not the real weakness of the cause, but the haste and superficiality of the advocate, that occasions defeat. While many a time, on the one hand, it has happened, that the pert and forward objector to Christianity has been foiled, and silenced, and put to confusion, (and in such circumstances, the Christian advocate should assuredly improve his advantage, not for self-exultation, not for vain-glorious triumph, not for contemptuous derision and trampling upon the fallen, but with meekness and affectionate tenderness, for pressing home the truth, and recommending it to acceptance,) yet, on the other hand, the friends of Christianity had need to be cautious, and not too hastily and inconsiderately to throw down the gauntlet to the infidel. When one thus enters the lists without due forethought and preparation,—not sufficiently aware of infidel plausibilities and sceptical subtleties—much harm, instead of benefit, may be the result. The be-



liever of the truth may “have the witness in himself” of its being from God. He feels its holy power. In this experience he has solid ground of peace and hope,—there being, at the same time, a clear discernment of the adaptation of the gospel to his own exigencies and to the character of God. But still, this is not enough to bring against a practised sceptic,—a skilful infidel antagonist. Various are the subtleties, which, though refuted a thousand times, the particular advocate may not find himself at the moment in a condition to meet; and a defeat or silencing from this cause, is apt to have a very injurious effect both on his own mind and on that of his adversary—throwing a painful doubt over his own faith, and confirming his adversary’s unbelief and self-sufficient scorn.

Perhaps, however, the principal reference in the verse is to matters of *personal injury* and *personal difference*. This appears from next verse:—“Debate thy cause with thy neighbour himself, and discover not a secret to another.”—You may compare with these verses Matt. xviii. 15—18. You will observe, that in the two passages the *principle* is the same. In the latter, however, it is formally laid down as a binding law, in all its successive steps, in the social intercourse of fellow-Christians in the church. Look, then, at the duty—taking both passages together:—

1. An injury is supposed to have been done and sustained, but not to be publicly known—to be confined, in the knowledge of it, to the parties themselves. It is of consequence to mark this, because the rule is often misapprehended, and applied in cases where it has no propriety and no obligation,—to which neither Solomon nor Christ referred,—*cases of open and known trespass*. In the spirit of it, it ought, I think, to be applied in cases of sin known to us as having been done by another, but known, we have reason to believe, to us only, even although the sin may not be of the nature of *personal* offence. The chief reference, however, is to offences of the latter description. The rule is a good one in *all* such cases: and when they occur between brethren in a church of Christ, it is, in every step

of the process prescribed by the Church's Head, of indispensable obligation.

2. When the wrong, then, has been done, the *first* duty is, to go to our neighbour himself, and when he is by himself;—to lay our grievance calmly and faithfully, and in the spirit of affection, before him; in the same spirit to expostulate with him; to convince him of the wrong he has done; to propose reasonable terms of reconciliation and agreement,—all under the influence of a sincere desire to gain him over by kind and becoming means.

3. It is implied in this, that the "*secret*," as Solomon terms it, is not to be divulged either *before* the interview, or if the interview prove successful, *after* it. *Not before*; for this, if known to him, will prevent his listening to you in a temper of mind that promises a successful issue; and, should he learn it subsequently, may undo all the benefit:—*not after*, when you have effected your object; for this too may go far to nullify the favourable result, opening the wound, giving *him* ground of offence in his turn, and so widening the breach and confirming the distance.

4. Observe the consequence, as stated in the tenth verse, of transgressing the salutary direction:—"Lest he that heareth it put thee to shame, and thine infamy turn not away." That is, if you *do* "discover the secret," this comes to the ear of the other party, and "shame" and "infamy" will follow. Even if the representation you have given of the case be a perfectly fair one, and he have no cause, in that respect, for complaint, still you have broken implied faith; you have made an uncalled-for and unfriendly disclosure of what it was understood was to go no further; you have unnecessarily and unkindly made his faults known. And if, on the contrary,—which is much more likely, you have given a representation as favourable as possible to yourselves, and proportionally unfavourable to him,—then you bring upon yourself a double ground of resentment and of odium. Not your adversary alone, but all will disapprove and reprobate; and the blot may adhere to your character all your days; the "infamy" may *never* "turn away."

5. The same duty of faithful reticence is strictly applicable to all secrets committed to us by others. They should be held sacred,—the trust inviolable. On this important matter,—a matter too lightly thought of even when right principles are admitted,—allow me to offer a few directions. 1. When you have got a secret committed to you, the temptation is, in some cases, very strong to make it known. You have a feeling of superiority in knowing something of which others are ignorant; and, it may be, of self-importance in having been made its confidential depositaries. There is a vanity in being able to say—*I know something which you don't*. And there is a vanity too of having confidence reposed in you. You would fain have this known. But alas! for the dilemma. If it remains *unknown*, your vanity remains ungratified; and then, if you tell it, you prove that of the very confidence reposed in you, and of which you were so vain, you have not been worthy: so you put yourself effectually to shame. 2. There is a temptation to reveal a secret in the friendship and intimacy of the person to whom you tell it. You think this friendship requires it of you, and that there is no true friendship where there is secrecy,—that all should be unreserved between bosom friends. But, whatever friendship requires, it can never require this. The obligation of intimacy with one can never be a sufficient reason for violating an obligation under which you have come to another. No friendship, how strong soever its ties and its claims, can be an apology for betraying a third party—for breaking your word. 3. You may sometimes feel tempted to divulge a secret by the idea that making it known, in some particular quarter, may be the means of good to him whose secret it is. By telling it to such a one, you may benefit him. Even this will not do. For, first, “the heart is deceitful;” and you may, unconsciously, be influenced by mingled motives, and be covering the one under the other:—and then, secondly, your clear duty, in every such case, is, to tell him first, and let him judge for himself as to what you propose, and, if he is satisfied, so far release and set you free. 4. *The fewer secrets the better*. The making of a confidential communi-

cation may of course be occasionally necessary. But where there is no necessity for it, it had better be avoided. Multiplied secrets are only multiplied temptations; and there is a vast deal too much of trifling with what ought to be sacred. *Make* as few of them as you can; and *take* as few of them as you can. 5. It is exceedingly criminal in any one to tempt another, and try to persuade him to divulge what has been confidentially committed to him;—to worm it out of him. This is infamous. It is usually done, as might be expected, by assurances of perfect secrecy. No one shall ever get it from *them*. They will be still as the grave. Now, for my own part, I should always be disposed to be the closer, the greater anxiety was by any one discovered to induce me to make the disclosure. My confidence in his assurances should proportionally be lessened. He who tempts another to do what is wrong, does not give very satisfactory ground for trusting that he will never do the same wrong himself. To tempt another to any sin is the next thing to our own doing it. 6. When you are about to receive a secret from another, and you have in your mind any *exceptions* from the restriction,—individuals to whom you imagine it will be no violation of your engagement to impart it,—these exceptions ought to be mentioned. You have no right to make them to yourself, while you are supposed by the person who imparts to you the secret to be making none, but to receive his communication as a confidential one with no reservation. This is treachery. It is evidently, in such cases, duty to intimate the particular exceptions you are desirous to make, and to get from your friend special permission respecting them. This should be done, even if the exception were the wife of your bosom. If you cannot get the permission you desire, decline receiving the communication. 7. There is one case however, I think, which must absolve from the obligation of secrecy. It is when the keeping of the secret is to work *essential injury to a third party*. In this case the secret resembles the taking of a rash oath, such as cannot be fulfilled without doing harm to our fellow-creatures, or violating some express com-

mand of God. No one will say that Herod did right in keeping his foolish oath, when the fulfilment of it required the murder of John the Baptist. With regard to ourselves, —when we come to see that the keeping of a secret, like the keeping of an oath, is all but sure to be injurious to us, we may with propriety *seek to be released*; but if we cannot prevail, I presume the case will come under the description of one of the features in the character of the good man described by the Psalmist,—who “swaureth to his own hurt, and changeth not.”

Verse 11. “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.”—What is the comparison here? It has been variously understood. The word rendered “*pictures*” is generally conceived rather to mean *net-work* or *lattice-work*:—and the *apples* to be either *artificial* apples represented by the skilful workman in an ornamental basket of silver filigree, or *real* apples, of golden hue, brought to table in such a basket. The allusion is evidently to some ornamental work of exquisite device and execution, known in those days.\* What, then, is the *import* of the comparison? “*A word*” may signify a word of counsel, of instruction, of encouraging commendation, and especially (as the following verse suggests) of reproof. But it is not *every* such word that is meant. It must be “*fitly spoken*,” as the golden apples are by the artificer duly fitted, so as to appear to the best advantage through the interstices of the silver. In order to a word’s being “*fitly spoken*,” it must be *well-suited to the occasion and the character*; must be *well-timed*; *well-spirited*; *well-expressed*. When a word—especially a word of reproof, the administering of which is so difficult and delicate a task—is, in all the senses mentioned, “*fitly spoken*,” there is blended with our sentiment of approbation the agreeable emotion of *surprise* and *admiration*.

\* “The idea is that of a garment of precious stuff, on which is embroidered golden apples among picture-work of silver. Costly and precious was such a garment held to be; for besides the ornaments upon it, the material itself was of high value.” So Stuart, perhaps rightly. The general sentiment remains the same.

Verse 12. "As an ear-ring of gold, and an ornament of fine gold, so is a wise reprover upon an obedient ear."—In this comparison, as in the preceding, *ornament* and *value* are united. And, as the ornament selected is that of *the ear*, the comparison may be meant to convey the idea that an ear that listens obediently to instruction and reproof, is more valuably adorned than that which is ornamented with the most costly jewels.

When a reproof is both administered in wisdom and received in humility and in good part,—then there is a union of two equal rarities. A reproof well-administered is rare; and not less so is a reproof well taken. We may remark, however, that the rareness of the latter arises, to no small extent, out of the rareness of the former. It is because reproof is so seldom well-*given*, that it is so seldom well-*taken*.

How becoming—how truly ornamental, and worthy of admiration, the union here supposed! And then, how valuable! how really precious, in the effects resulting! There is *first*, the prevention, or the correction of evil. There is, *secondly*, the friendship, begun or confirmed, of the parties themselves; as says the Psalmist—"Let the righteous smite me, it shall be a kindness; and let him reprove me, it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head: for yet my prayer also shall be in their calamities," Psalm cxli. 5. And there is, *thirdly*, the admiring and approving and affectionate attachment of all to both, and the beneficial influence of the good example. The jewel is both a credit to the artificer by whom it was fashioned, and an ornament to the person from whose ear it is suspended.

And if our ear, my brethren, should be open and obedient to the reproofs of fellow-creatures, O how much more to those of our divine Master and Lord! *He* is, indeed, a wise reprover. Grace was poured into his lips. All his instructions are true; all his promises faithful; all his precepts holy and just and good; all his admonitions gracious and kind. Obedience to him will ever be for our good; while to refuse his reproof, and to throw off and spurn away his yoke, is infatuation. For all the various situations of trial

and difficulty, of temptation and perplexity, in which his people can be placed, he has “a word in season.” O how fitly spoken!—how good is it! how appropriate! how precious! Where is the child of God who has not experienced this? Let His words be valued by us as jewels of fine gold!

Verse 13. “As the cold of snow in the time of harvest, so is a faithful messenger to them that send him; for he refresheth the soul of his masters.”—*Snow in the time of harvest*, and the cold accompanying it, would have been a very unnatural, unwonted, and unwelcome occurrence in Judea. It is to nothing of this kind that the allusion is made in the verse. It was the season of heat, often oppressively great. The comparison is taken from the use then made of snow, which had been preserved from the previous winter, in cooling their wines and other drinks, and thus rendering them deliciously refreshing. Snow was used, in a similar manner as ice is among ourselves. It was thus the means of providing refreshment from what without it could have yielded comparatively little. The meaning of the comparison is plain. The pleasure experienced by him who commissions a messenger to execute a trust, will ever be proportioned, when the message is faithfully, wisely, and successfully fulfilled, to the amount of importance attached to the commission, and the consequent degree of solicitude about the result;—and especially when any measure of dependency existed respecting it. When any business is managed, with such fidelity, sound judgment, and perseverance, as to recover and rectify what had almost been given up as hopeless,—then the heart that was dispirited and faint is revived; even as the overheated and exhausted labourer is refreshed, exhilarated, and animated for renewed toil by the snow-cooled beverage. One thing ought here to be remarked—that we are a great deal too prone to form our judgment of a messenger’s merits simply by his *success*. But this is often far from fair, whether the commission be one of public or of private business. There may be a large amount of fidelity, and of all the qualities of a disinterested and devoted messenger, where there is little success,—nay,

where there is entire failure. All may be done, and done well, that could be done; and yet, through the character of the parties with whom he has to conduct the negotiation, and through circumstances utterly beyond his control, a messenger may not succeed. In some cases, indeed, there may be a much greater degree of praiseworthiness, where there has been failure, than where all has succeeded to a wish. In not a few instances, we should deal most unjustly, and measure out our commendations and rewards in most undue proportions, were *success* to be our sole criterion. It ought to be,—and with a truly generous and right-hearted master it always will be,—a source of satisfaction and gratification, to contemplate the completeness of the management, and the spirit with which all has been done for his interest, even though the issue be disappointment; and justice will make *this* the measure of desert.

Thus will God deal with *His* servants. Jesus was the Father's messenger to the world. And he was "faithful to Him that appointed him." And in contemplating him, in his person and in his work, He said of him—"Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles," Isa. xlii. 1. The Apostles were Christ's messengers to the world. They were like their divine Master in faithful devotedness. They "refreshed the soul of that Master." He delighted in them and in their work. Through their instrumentality, he saw of the "travail of his soul, and was satisfied." And he sees of it still.

O let us all, in our several spheres, be faithful to Him—"faithful even unto death," and our *faithfulness* shall have a full and rich reward. How anxious should we all be, to commend ourselves to the Master, to whom we must stand or fall; to act under the influence of principles and motives which have his sanction; to do our duty well, from "faith working by love;" so that we may hear him say to us—"Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord!"



## LECTURE LXXVIII.

PROV. xxv. 14—20.

“Whoso boasteth himself of a false gift is like clouds and wind without rain. By long forbearing is a prince persuaded, and a soft tongue breaketh the bone. Hast thou found honey? eat so much as is sufficient for thee, lest thou be filled therewith, and vomit it. Withdraw thy foot from thy neighbour’s house; lest he be weary of thee, and so hate thee. A man that beareth false witness against his neighbour is a maul, and a sword, and a sharp arrow. Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble is like a broken tooth, and a foot out of joint. As he that taketh away a garment in cold weather, and as vinegar upon nitre; so is he that singeth songs to an heavy heart.”

THE comparison in the first of these verses is a very obvious and a very apt one. “Clouds and wind” were, in that country, an ordinary presage of “rain.”\* But there, as with ourselves, appearances might be very promising and prove deceitful—raising expectations, possibly after long, weary, and threatening drought, only to disappoint them, and so to increase vexation and apprehension. Thus it is with the man who boasts mightily of what he *can* do, and *will* do,—making large promises either without *intention* to fulfil them, or without *ability*.

Such boasters talk as if all creation were at their disposal. Nothing too hard for them! their resources and their influence are without limits! When you apply to them for a favour, they are full of gasconade about what they have in their power; give you, with not a little exaggeration, instances of what they have done for others; and—O yes; there is no

\* See 1 Kings xviii. 44, 45.

doubt of their ability ; and what is there they would not do for *you*? But it is all words—big words ; and the bigger if others besides yourselves are within hearing—but as light and empty as air-bubbles :—“ *clouds and wind without rain.*”

Others, from mere unwillingness to deny you, or to seem unkind, cannot find in their hearts to say No, and make hasty promises in plenty. But they are only to please you for the time. They have not considered them ; and, although it might be too strong to affirm, that they do not at the time mean what they say, yet neither can they be regarded as having any firm purpose of fulfilling it. Their kind words have served their present end ;—have saved them the pain of refusing and disobliging you. But in practice they come to nothing. When your time of need arrives, what have you? They are in profession as kind as ever ; and as their kindness before vented itself in promises, it is now not less abundant in apologies and regrets. They are so sorry—so very very sorry ;—and then you have a string of unsatisfactory *Buts*—an enumeration of preventives :—“ *clouds and wind without rain.*”

It may be regarded as a wise and safe rule, to *trust the less*, in proportion as a man is wide and boastful in his promises. Let your confidence be in the inverse ratio of the boasting. Genuine friendship deals not in such vauntings. *Deeds* are its characteristics, more than words. It acts quietly ; lets its gifts fall silently and unostentatiously ; neither talking much itself, nor ambitious of being talked about. It would infinitely rather come unexpectedly on its object with a seasonable interposition, than raise expectations beforehand by promises that may fail. True friendship—real goodness—may be described by a figure which forms a contrast to the one before us :—“ When the clouds are full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth,” Eccl. xi. 3. Such clouds aptly represent faithful benefactors ;—bountiful, unpretending, unostentatious friends.

Verse 15. “ By long forbearing is a prince persuaded, and a soft tongue breaketh the bone.” “ *A soft tongue breaketh the bone,*” is one of those short and pithy expressions of a

general sentiment, which is the character of so many proverbs. What is the sentiment? Evidently, that *gentle means are the most effectual*. The reference is to cases of displeasure, and the means of pacifying it. It is true, that there is a great variety of tempers, and that these require to be dealt with in various ways. But in cases of resentment,—whether reasonable or unreasonable, with or without ground,—the sentiment will be found to hold good to a very great extent. By the pouring on of oil you may smooth the wave, which you would rebuke and lash in vain.

If the displeasure be well-founded,—that is, if we really have provoked and deserved it,—then gentleness, and submission, and apology are a clearly incumbent duty. What right can we have to take high what we have brought upon ourselves? Hard words, in such a case, would obviously be most incongruous and unprincipled; and they would have no other effect than that of exasperating passion. If, on the other hand, it be unreasonable,—when nothing on our part has been said or done to warrant it,—then the consciousness of not deserving it should sustain our minds in a dignified calmness, and restrain us from angry and violent expostulation or reviling. The most consistent frame of spirit, so far as we ourselves are concerned, and the best suited for conciliation and peace,—for disarming and subduing passion and pride, is a gentle and placid firmness. For it ought to be understood, that “a *soft* tongue” is not the tongue of weakness and silliness, that has not manliness enough to feel or to take its due and proper position:—neither is it a flattering, fawning tongue, that coaxes into conciliation by saying whatever will please, whether there be dignity, and self-respect, and truth in it, or not. The gentleness of temper, deportment, and speech, which the divine word inculcates, is perfectly consistent with firmness and energy of principle. It is not the gentleness of mean sycophantish pliancy, that is reckless of principle and consistency. Yet one almost fears to introduce these qualifications and admissions, lest undue advantage be taken of them to cover and excuse frames of spirit which neither the precepts nor the example

of Jesus our Master would justify;—vindicating under one name of becoming manliness what *He* would condemn as pride,—and unyielding obstinacy under the well-sounding designation of decision of character. O! we need the grace of Christ to enable us to unite the qualities of firmness and gentleness, as they were united in Him.

Of the general sentiment we have a *particular* application in the former part of the verse:—“*By long forbearance is a prince persuaded.*”—From his eminent station, and from being accustomed to obeisance, “a *prince*” may be supposed more than ordinarily touchy and jealous of his honour and authority,—more apt to stand upon the punctilio of due submission—more difficult than others of persuasion and conciliation. Petulance, forwardness, self-sufficiency, and passion, will only inflame him the more, and expose ourselves to the weight of his wrath. There must be no cringing meanness, no compromise of principle, no apologies for unreal faults,—which would be worse than stooping from the dignity which every man ought to maintain,—a dereliction in part of the claims of conscience: but still, we are bound to be, in all cases, respectful and mild; and if we are enabled thus to combine meekness and gentleness with adherence to principle, “the prince” may not only be won, but led to admire the consistency, that would not, for any selfish consideration, bend to unworthy compliances, and cringe and fawn for favour.

Verse 16. “Hast thou found honey? eat so much as is sufficient for thee, lest thou be filled therewith, and vomit it.”—This language is evidently to be taken, in the proverbial use of it here, as significant of *any worldly enjoyment*. The language can hardly be applied to *spiritual sweets*. We do not meet, in the Bible, with warnings against excess in these. There is little risk of an extreme in that direction. But when the “*honey,*” as here, is the emblem of *earthly sweets*, of mere temporal enjoyments,—there is great need for the caution,—a caution against excess in the desire, in the pursuit, and in the use of them. Pleasant they are in themselves; and God kindly gives us them to be enjoyed—to be received and used with gratitude and cheerfulness.

But they must be enjoyed with a united sense of obligation and of dependence, and in the remembrance that all excess and all abuse involve a violation of the spirit of both.

Verse 17. "Withdraw thy foot from thy neighbour's house; lest he be weary of thee, and so hate thee."—This is another lesson of *moderation*, though of a very different kind. It relates to the discreet use of the privilege of social and friendly intercourse. There is in this a prudence and a sense of propriety, which is indispensable to its cordial maintenance and its permanent constancy. It is one of those things in which there is no possibility of drawing precise lines,—prescribing the exact degree of frequency with which every relation, and friend, and neighbour should be visited, and the number of minutes each visit should last. All must be regulated by circumstances; and these circumstances may hardly in two cases be in every respect the same. Discretion and good sense must guide. But of these qualities there are some persons who have a very scanty portion. Such persons are to be found in both sexes. They are fond of incessant gossiping. They are ever on their round of calls and visits. Instead of being "keepers at home"—instead of "doing their own business"—they are, day after day, "going from house to house"—each morning planning their circuit. Or, when they are out, and "their neighbour's house" is in their way, they cannot think of passing the door without just stepping in. They enter. They merely looked in in passing—they cannot sit down. But they are prevailed upon. And when once they are fairly set, they forget their haste. They are very loath to move. They talk of doing so twenty times before it is done; and many precious hours are lounged away in unprofitable idleness. If such persons have any thing in the form of a general invitation, in the common style of courtesy, they are sure to avail themselves of it to the uttermost, how slight and incidental soever it may have been. They never need a second. They continue to come, and come, and come,—consuming the time, disarranging the order, disturbing the enjoyment,

and in some cases, living on the substance, of other families.

This becomes irksome. Their neighbours weary of them. They fret inwardly, when they make their appearance. Their liking to them cools; and by degrees positive alienation takes its place; and those whom at first they courteously and kindly made welcome, they actually *cannot bear*. They become, in one short but expressive, though perhaps sufficiently familiar word for this place—a *bore*. Delicacy, at the same time, forbids this to be plainly said; and such persons, having generally no great portion of such delicacy themselves, are exceedingly slow to discover it:—till at length *rudeness* becomes a matter of necessity; and hints, —gentle perhaps at first, but broader and broader till understood and taken,—are thrown out, that less frequent visits will be acceptable.

Our strongly condemnatory description of *these* persons must not drive others to the opposite extreme. For fear of the evil here supposed, some “withdraw their foot” *altogether*: they do not visit *at all*. This course is hardly less reprehensible than the former. Among all, and especially among fellow-Christians, it looks distant and dry. It is inconsistent with all the claims of friendship. A mutual exchange of visits, in the way of promoting mutual love and mutual advantage, is desirable, and is a duty. But assuredly, it is better to be blamed for the fewness of our visits, than for their frequency;—better far to be wished *back* than to be wished *away*. The persons I have been sketching ought to be discouraged. They are idle; and they encourage others to be idle. They are temptations, moreover, to different evils: to the common practice, for example, of what is called *denying* one’s self, or saying *not at home*: (which, let it be vindicated, disguised, palliated, apologized for as you will, is neither more nor less than direct and palpable *lying*;) and *secondly*, to a large amount of hypocrisy—the dissembling of the real state of the feelings and the wishes; so that the scene may at times be presented—so inconsistent with “simplicity and godly sincerity”—of a grumble

and a scowl when the unwelcome visitor's knock comes to the door,—the exchange of this for the assumed looks and words of civility when the door opens and he enters;—and the “*glad he's gone!*” as soon as his back is turned, and the door closes after him. Here then, as in every thing, let us “deal prudently;” and let us look for grace to enable us. Let our visits neither be unseasonably paid, nor unduly prolonged, nor too frequently repeated. And let such intercourse be maintained as shall at once keep alive the feeling and the principle of union. Above all, “let love be without dissimulation.”

On the following verse, I pause only to make two remarks:—*First*, the language expresses strongly the mischief done by the “false witness” to him against whom he bears his lying testimony—against whom he swears falsely. He is “a maul,\* and a sword, and a sharp arrow.” He wounds and injures him by his lying words, as really, and in some respects, it may be, incomparably more seriously and irreparably, than if he were assailing him with the lethal weapons here alluded to. He may inflict wounds that cannot be cured, on his person, his substance, his credit, his character, his happiness, his life.—*Secondly*, such a man,—the man who has no conscience, no regard to truth, or regard to the well-being of others,—who is capable of swearing away by falsehood the name and interest and life and property of his neighbour—is a man whom all will shun and dread, as they would an armed enemy;—as they would the hand that brandishes in threatening attitude the instruments of mutilation and death.

Verse 19. “Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble is like a broken tooth, and a foot out of joint.”—Every one feels in a moment the truth and the force of this comparison—this *double* comparison. There are two obvious points in the similitude:—1. The unfaithful man, equally with the broken tooth and the dislocated foot,

\* A *maul* is an English word now obsolete, signifying a *heavy hammer* or *club*.

*fails when put to use.* You try your tooth upon your food; but you can make nothing of it:—you try your limb, for support and motion, but it will not serve you. So, you try the man by whose promises you have been encouraged to confide in him, and to look for good at his hand, but your confidence is vain. He fails you. He is the “*broken tooth,*” the “*foot out of joint.*”—2. There is more than failure, there is *pain*; there is accompanying torture. The broken tooth, when you attempt to use it, and the disjointed foot, when you rest the weight of your body upon it, each causes intolerable agony. And such is the *mental* distress which is caused by the failure of confidence, in proportion to the degree in which you had cherished it. Especially is this felt “*in time of trouble,*” when help is peculiarly needed, and when a kind of claim, independently of all professions and promises, is felt to exist on sympathy and kindness. Then the heart is sensitively alive to aught like neglect and disappointment. To trust and be deceived is *at any time* a bitter trial. To trust in “the time of trouble” and be deceived, is the extreme of mental suffering.

How acutely did Paul feel the truth of the proverb when he wrote to Timothy—“At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge.”—And did not our blessed Master feel it, when he said, “All ye shall be offended because of me this night:” and when, accordingly, in the hour of danger, “all his disciples forsook him and fled?”—and when he who had most solemnly protested his unconquerable adherence denied with oaths and curses that he knew Him?—O let us rejoice, that, whatever may come of our confidence in *men*, we have one sure, tried, ever-faithful Friend, who never has deceived, and never can deceive; on whose word we may rely without fear; who will prove himself “a very present help in time of trouble;” *then*, in a special manner, when the need of it is most felt, vouchsafing His presence, the light of his countenance, his timely and effective aid.

Verse 20. “As he that taketh away a garment in cold



weather, and as vinegar upon nitre; so is he that singeth songs to an heavy heart.”—We may conceive a kind of suggestive association between this verse and the preceding. In the nineteenth we have the misery of disappointment when we have, “*in time of trouble,*” relied on the promises or the professions of friendship given by a man who then proves unfaithful. *There* is one description of distress in the time of suffering and trial; here we have another, though of a different kind;—the pain which is inflicted, especially on spirits of delicate sensibility, by the injudicious and incongruous administration of comfort,—both in the matter and in the manner of it. The figure, or comparison, here used to convey the idea of extreme unsuitableness, is a very strong and a very expressive one. I should rather say that *both* comparisons are so. The “*taking away* of a garment in cold weather,”—at the very time, that is, when an additional garment would be requisite for comfort,—would involve in it a combination of *absurdity* and *cruelty*. It would be exceedingly foolish and exceedingly unkind. In the second comparison, “*nitre*” does not mean the salt so called by us—*saltpetre*; but rather an alkaline substance, which was called by the Romans *nitrum*, and which, in a particular state of preparation, was used in Judea for *soap*. Vinegar, or any other acid, poured on this substance would, from the want of chemical affinity between them, produce effervescence; and this appears to be the similitude intended;—the want of *affinity* between the song of mirth and the spirit of heaviness. It is incongruous, disquieting, agitating. To sing merry songs to one whose heart is at the time under the pressure of grief, or even in the presence of the dejected and sorrowful, and especially when the sorrow is recent, and the mind has had no time to recover its tone and balance,—discovers mournful ignorance of human nature. These are extremes which can never meet. The very attempt to introduce all at once the lightness of mirth into a wounded and heavily-burdened heart, produces a revulsion, of which the necessary effect is only to render the sadness the deeper. And this effect arises, not merely

from the contrariety between what is sung and the state of the spirit, but by the apparent *want of feeling* on the part of him who treats our sorrow thus. It is impossible to persuade ourselves that he feels *with* us or feels *for* us, when, instead of entering by a sympathetic tenderness into the true state of our minds, he discovers such lightness in his. And this painful apprehension is only a new and additional source of heaviness. Few things can operate more directly in this way, than to see one whose heart we expected to be in harmony with our own, manifesting so opposite a frame of mind. Some people are very thoughtless and injudicious in this respect. By trying to accomplish too sudden and violent a transition, they effectually frustrate their purpose, and, instead of alleviating, aggravate the evil. Even although not meant as a taunt, it is apt to have the effect of one; the effect so touchingly described in the case of the captives of Judah in Babylon:—"By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down; yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion. How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" Psal. cxxxvii. 1—4.

No one who has studied the constitution of the human mind, will ever attempt (unless in some peculiar cases of mental derangement) to work upon it by violent transitions. He who does so will generally be even more than disappointed. The likelihood is that he will either augment what he intended to lessen, or give rise to some other effect not less to be deplored than the one meant to be remedied.

The same observations apply to all attempts to put down the spirit of melancholy—whether constitutional or induced—by the opposite extreme of merriment,—to banish grief by scenes of joviality. Persons under deep dejection may sometimes, by dint of importunity, be prevailed upon to go into the midst of a gay party, where all is hilarity,—all jest and song. But the very effort to assume an air of

cheerfulness,—to join in the buoyant festivity and mirth, has been distressingly painful, and subsequent reflection on the incongruity (as they have felt it to be) between the scene and their circumstances, has sunk them the deeper afterwards,—through dissatisfaction with themselves.

With regard to any who can *on purpose* insult the sorrowing and heavy heart by the song of mirthful gaiety,—they are *monsters*—not men. They deserve not a place in the society of human beings.—And there is one description of mental distress, with which the world have not—and cannot be expected to have—any sympathy. They frequently indeed deal by it very roughly and cruelly—

“Regardless of wringing and breaking a heart  
Already to sorrow resigned.”

I mean *spiritual dejection*. I will not give it the name of *religious melancholy*; for that is an unhappy misnomer, expressing what has no existence. There is no description of melancholy which in itself can with truth be called *religious*,—though there is much that may spring from subjects that bear a close affinity to religion. Melancholy and dejection of spirit arises, not from religion, but from the absence of it, or from defective and erroneous conceptions of it. Rightly understood, it is its only true and effectual cure. It is the light which, introduced into the mind, dissipates its darkness and dreariness. It is the balm that soothes, mollifies, and heals the wounded spirit. It is all restorative, all cheering. Trouble of spirit does arise from conviction of sin, and of exposure, on account of it, to “the wrath to come,” and from the secret, deep-felt, irrepressible apprehension of that wrath. But such conviction, such pain, such fear, *are not religion*. They are the very things which religion is designed and fitted to remove. The truth of the gospel—the message of mercy—understood and received in its divine authority and simplicity, sets all to rights. It dispels the gloom. It introduces the sunshine of joy. It stills the trembling heart. It dries the bitter tear, and sends after it the tear of delight and gratitude,—the drops of gen-

uine penitential tenderness, mingling, as they always do, with those of calm, thankful, thrilling ecstasy. To the spirit that is loaded with a sense of guilt, and bowed to the dust by the apprehension of coming wrath, there is no song but one that can impart relief and joy,—none but one that can harmonize its jarring emotions, and soothe it to permanent peace. It is the song of the angels at the nativity of the Saviour—"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men,"—or of the redeemed multitude before the throne—for the spirit of both is the same—"Worthy is the Lamb that was slain"—"Thou art worthy, for thou hast redeemed us unto God by thy blood." Let but that blood touch the heart, and all its alarms are hushed. The lips will be tuned to the notes of that song. It will "throw off its sackcloth, and gird itself with gladness."

## LECTURE LXXIX

—♦—  
PROV. XXV. 21—28.

“ If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink: for thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the Lord shall reward thee. The north wind driveth away rain; so doth an angry countenance a backbiting tongue. It is better to dwell in a corner of the housetop, than with a brawling woman, and in a wide house. As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country. A righteous man falling down before the wicked is as a troubled fountain, and a corrupt spring. It is not good to eat much honey; so for men to search their own glory is not glory. He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls.”

THE “honour which cometh from men,” and which men assert for themselves even at the sword’s point, is very diverse from the “honour which cometh from God,” and which He has enjoined on His children to covet. The one is the honour of pride,—the other of humility; the one the honour of allowing no injury to be unavenged,—the other of forgiving wrongs and covering the multitude of sins; the one the honour of the mere natural and conventional courage that exposes life for life, rather than allow the slightest or most imaginary affront to pass unavenged,—the other the moral courage that sets at nought the contempt of men rather than incur the displeasure of God.—In His eye, and in the eye of every holy being, a victory gained in the way prescribed by the opening verses of this passage, is incomparably more glorious than even the deepest humiliation of an adversary by an opposite course—by the wrath-breathing retaliations of pride. It is a

*double* victory,—a victory over ourselves as well as over our enemy.\*

In these remarks, I have taken for granted, what I believe to be the truth, that the words "*for thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head,*" have reference, not to the fires of divine vengeance, but to the influence of kindly treatment melting down the enemy to conciliation, as fuel heaped on the ore fuses it from its hardness, and sends it forth in liquid streams, to take the features and impress of the mould.—A certain prince, on leading his generals and his army against an advancing host of invaders, declared his resolution not to leave a single enemy alive. He sent an embassy to treat with them. He made proposals such as subdued and attached them, and rendered them valuable allies. On astonishment being expressed that he should have thus failed in his determination and promise, his ready reply was—"I have not failed: I have kept my word. I engaged not to leave a *living enemy*; nor have I. They are enemies no longer—they are *friends*." He had "heaped coals of fire on their head."

Verse 23. "The north wind driveth away rain; so doth an angry countenance a backbiting tongue."—You will observe that the marginal rendering just reverses the meaning:—"The north wind bringeth forth rain; so doth a backbiting tongue an angry countenance." Some critics insist on this being the true rendering. The latter words of the verse are certainly capable of either arrangement: and if the verb rendered "*driveth away*" would not bear that meaning, but *required* being translated as in the margin, then of course we should have to bow to the force of necessity. That rendering, however, is defended by other critics, as one of which the original word *is susceptible*. And I confess that if the word will bear it at all, it appears to me decidedly preferable. There is something tame, common-place, and of little practical consequence,—hardly worth forming the subject of a proverb,—in saying that as the north wind

\* For further illustration, see verses 17, 18, and 29, of the preceding chapter.

brings rain “a backbiting tongue” brings anger. But the verse, as it stands in our translation, inculcates a most important lesson—namely, *the way to discourage and repress slander*. “*Backbiting*” is a word which sufficiently conveys its own meaning. It is secretly traducing characters, by telling of them what is false, or even, for malicious purposes, by circulating clandestinely what is true. It is very generally accompanied with a hypocritical simulation of affection or admiration to the person’s face, while he is vilified in his absence. Some show much of this spirit of detraction. They never seem easy when they hear any one specially commended. They are ever disposed to throw in some qualifying insinuation,—something or other on the *per contra* side, to reduce the praise. They even appear to lay hold with delight on every opportunity to depreciate excellence; and particularly if there happens to be any kind of rivalry between the person who is the subject of commendation and themselves. O they do enjoy the bringing down of a rival! They spare no pains for this. And they often effect much in this way without uttering a word. A look, a wink, a shrug, a humph—can be made to convey a vast deal of meaning; and if the meaning be not explicit, so much the better. It is enough if suspicion is raised;—if the impression is made that there is *something* that is not right,—something which, if the eulogist but knew all, would go far to qualify his commendations.

On the other side, how sad the tendency in human nature to lend a ready ear to such! When the artful and practised backbiter, well aware of this, has by degrees got a willing listener, he goes on step by step—one thing after another—undermining and destroying the fair fame of the object of his dislike. He takes great care not to say too much all at once: that might shock and repel. He feigns reluctance. He is exceedingly concerned to be under the necessity of saying so; but truth obliges him. His object is, only to put you on your guard; to prevent your being led to any false course by taking up the representations of others, who happen not to know what *he* knows. He thinks it right at any rate that you should be made aware of the

true state of the case,—that you may feel and act accordingly.

All such vile “*backbiting*” should be met with “*an angry countenance.*” It should be instantly frowned away; no willing ear being ever lent to the defamer. Were all to act thus, and to stop his mouth with an indignant and resolute rebuke, it would put down the evil, “*as the north wind driveth away rain.*”

O let not this spirit and this practice be so much as named amongst believers. It is utterly adverse to the entire genius of the Gospel, and to the precepts and example of the Lord of Christians. The religion of Jesus is the religion of love,—love even to enemies; the religion too of open day-light, and singleness of heart;—the religion of that charity which “*thinketh no evil, which rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth.*”\*

Verse 25. “*As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country.*” A beautiful similitude! Its full import, no doubt, is best understood and felt in sultry climes. Yet even *we* can in some measure appreciate its propriety and force, if in the parching drought of summer we have ever slaked our thirst at the cooling spring, when oppressed by the heat and fatigue of a wearing-out journey. The very sight of such a spring is refreshment. It exhilarates the spirit, and gives new energy to the exhausted frame.

The simile is applicable to *all* “good news,”—especially to such as are more than ordinarily interesting to any of our natural and social affections; and in a peculiar manner, when the tidings are unexpected; more so still, when they come after long delay and corresponding anxiety,—when “*hope deferred has made the heart sick;*” when day after day,—week after week,—month after month, we have waited and longed, and sighed, and prayed, for favourable accounts, not of mere worldly property, but of *lives*, in which we feel

\* For the illustration of the following verse, the reader is referred to chaps. xix. 13; xxi. 9, 19, &c.



as if our own were bound up. Ah! do we not *then* enter into the full soul of the comparison?

And how peculiarly applicable is it to that best news that ever greeted the ears of sinful men!—the news that came from the heaven of heavens to this our apostate world, and of which angels were the first messengers, when they cheered the timid and alarmed spirits of the shepherds of Bethlehem with the proclamation—“Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people,”—and with that song of ravishing harmony, which, in the stillness of midnight, burst from ten thousand seraphic voices,—“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.” How can it but be a delightful thing to us, to hear how these good tidings (which alas! to so many are vapid and uninteresting as a tale twice told) are now so extensively published in heathen lands,—lands of spiritual drought and dreariness,—“thirsty lands wherein is no water!”—to hear of the progress of truth—of its victories over error—of its converting, sanctifying, gladdening, civilizing, saving influence! How full of refreshing and cheering effect on our spirits are such tidings! They are, of all others, the richest and sweetest in pleasure to the Christian heart. The highest authority assures us, that “there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth.” Even *there*, it seems, the truth of this verse is experienced. When the “good news” of the progress of the Redeemer’s kingdom by the conversion of sinners, and the additions thus made to the number of its subjects, reach that “land that is afar off”—that “land of sacred liberty and endless rest,”—it is, to the blessed inhabitants, like a fresh draught from the “pure river of water of life.” And the holy joy is shared by the pilgrims below. It reanimates and braces their spirits, in prosecuting their journey heavenward, amidst all the difficulties, temptations, and trials of the way. If we do experience the delight, let us seek in earnest, by increasing liberality and zeal, to procure it more and more for ourselves!—The good tidings are designed to prepare sinners for the glorious country whence the tidings come, and to put them

ultimately in happy possession of it. O sinner, prize those tidings. Hear, and believe them, that your soul may live!—Hear, and circulate them, that others may come to the same life;—the spiritual life on earth, introductory to the eternal life in heaven!

Verse 26. “A righteous man falling down before the wicked is as a troubled fountain and a corrupt spring.” Possibly this verse may have been suggested by the preceding in the arrangement, or copying out of the proverbs. There we have the refreshing influence on the soul of “good news” represented by the refreshing influence on the body of a draught of pure and wholesome water. But suppose a thirsty man, in high and longing expectation, comes to a fountain or a spring, and finds the fountain a puddle from agitation, or the spring embittered and poisoned by some nauseous and noxious ingredient—the disappointment is grievous. Such is our dissatisfaction, when “*the righteous falls down before the wicked.*”

The language has had different senses attached to it.—1. It has been understood of the righteous paying, whether from fear or from interest, *undue homage* to the wicked. There is miserable incongruity in this. It is a painful thing to witness; and it is injurious as well as painful—discovering an unworthy destitution of right principle, such as is fitted to produce very prejudicial effects on the minds of all, especially of the ungodly who witness the unseemly spectacle.—2. It has been understood of the righteous being *subjected to the arbitrary and capricious power of the wicked*—constrained to bend to his dictation and authority—deprived of his own will and freedom under the power of the unprincipled oppressor. This is the world turned upside down—the inversion of all that is right and seemly. The power should be with the righteous for the restraint of the wicked. The contrary is “like a troubled fountain and a corrupt spring.” It fails to produce the salutary effect which power properly lodged is fitted to produce. The fountains and springs of justice being by this means polluted and poisoned, society, instead of receiving benefit,

is injured accordingly. — But 3. The word in the original signifies to *slip* or *stumble*, so as to fall. And, as it bears this sense most naturally, I am inclined to understand the verse with those interpreters by whom it is explained of the righteous *falling* in a moral sense—falling *into sin*, in the presence of the wicked. This is, emphatically, “like a troubled fountain and a corrupt spring.” It disappoints our pleasing expectations of clear, sweet, refreshing water. From the righteous we look for an example that shall recommend religion—that shall draw others to its pure, and wholesome, and life-giving springs. When the conduct of professors, in presence of the ungodly, is such as to have the opposite tendency;—when its waters are turbid, and foul, and bitter, and, instead of inducing others to come to the fountain, serve to disgust and repel them—how incongruous—and how distressing!—Alas! that the incongruity should be so often seen!

The “troubled fountain and the corrupt spring” must send forth polluted, tainted, deadly streams. And so it is here. O! how much evil flows from the sins of God’s people! Look at the falls of David and Solomon themselves. From these “troubled fountains”—from these “corrupt springs”—streams of tainted and bitter waters have continued to flow from that day to this. The “man after God’s own heart,” and the “wisest of men,” have been the byword of the ungodly and sceptical in every age. How should this put us, and keep us, on our guard!

Verse 27. “It is not good to eat much honey; so for men to search their own glory is not glory.” You will observe, that in the latter clause of this verse, the words “*is not*” are supplementary,—being printed in *Italics*. They are evidently indispensable to complete the designed antithesis. The supplement seems to proceed on an admitted idiom in the Hebrew composition, according to which the *negative* in the former part of a sentence is *carried forward* and *understood* in the latter.\* Honey is good, in mode-

\* See for illustration Psal. ix. 18; lxxv. 5; xxxviii. 1; xlv. 18.—The idiom may be applied for the explanation of a passage otherwise

ration; a surfeit of it is injurious. (See v. 16.) In like manner, a regard to character and reputation,—a desire after a virtuous and honourable distinction,—is warrantable and right. It would be wrong for any man to be indifferent to what others think of him. It is not a matter connected with mere *feeling*. The usefulness of every man depends to a great degree upon the *character* he sustains. The only description of persons who may be considered as entitled to be regardless about character consists of those who have *no character to lose*.

But there is an extreme; and to that extreme Solomon here refers. There is such a thing as *vain glory*. There is such a thing as a person's indulging an insatiable appetite for applause and honour. There is such a thing as "*searching it out*," looking ever after it, eager to get it, and touchily jealous of every omission to bestow it and every deficiency in its amount; exploring for it in every possible direction; listening with an ear on the alert to catch every breathing of adulation; *fishing* for praise; throwing out hints to draw it forth; eulogizing others, to tempt a return; saying things in disparagement of oneself, for the sake of having them contradicted,—things which, said by another, would stir the hottest of his blood.—The temper of mind may be put in exercise, in regard to greater and to smaller matters. It may assume the form of a proud ambition, or of a weak-minded

involving a painful and revolting difficulty. It is in the charge of David, when dying, to his son and successor Solomon (1 Kings ii. 9). The *not* should be carried on to the last clause. And accordingly, the charge, so understood, corresponds precisely to the course which Solomon actually pursued. He allowed Shimei his life, under the limitation of his strictly confining himself within the city. To the condition Shimei assented. And it was *not* for his conduct to David, but in consequence of his violating the stipulated terms on which his life had been granted, that he was afterwards put to death. This makes all consistent. The very terms of the charge itself, connected with the previous reason or ground of it, requires this interpretation:—verse 8.—(*Author*). Stuart disputes the application of the principle in this verse of Proverbs, and renders, "searching after one's own glory is *burdensome*," referring the original term in its second occurrence to the primary meaning of the Hebrew verb with which it is connected.

vanity. But in either case it may with truth be said that “*it is not glory.*”—A man’s honour should rather *come to him*, than be eagerly solicited and searched for. It should not be made *his object*. If we follow the example of Jesus,\* we shall seek *God’s* glory as our first and constant aim, not our own. And this is the way to true glory; for He says—“him that honoureth me I will honour.”

The closing verse may be regarded as a kind of counterpart to the 32d verse of the sixteenth chapter. There we have the wise man’s commendation of self-control; and here, under a very apt similitude, the evil effects of the want of it. “He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls.” Such a city is in a state of complete insecurity and exposure,—open to the assault, and the sure prey, of every invader. And to what can the man be more fitly compared, who is destitute of self-government,—swayed by the uncontrolled mastery of his angry and resentful temper? It is in every one’s power to take advantage of such a man; to get the better of him; to make him miserable. Any one knows how to provoke him. It is as easy as marching into a city whose defences are prostrate, whose walls are broken down. Thus any one who has a spite at the passionate man may satiate his malice to the full by touching the spring that is sure to throw him off his guard. He will then more surely expose himself, than his enemy, by all he had it in his power to say, could possibly do.

Further, *Satan* takes advantage of such a character. He is easy of access, and easy of capture. He can, with all facility, by touching his passions—by throwing a spark amidst the inflammable and fiery material within, lead him, or rather drive him, to sin,—making him the unconscious instrument of his evil purposes. By the indulgence of an angry spirit a man “gives place” to the devil. He opens to him the garrison of his heart. His spiritual state is in continual and imminent danger. His soul is exposed to every assault of

\* See John vii. 18; viii. 50; v. 41.

every enemy and in hourly peril of being sacked and plundered of all that is dear to its feelings and its hopes:—"even like a city that is broken down, and without walls."

One thing more. The temper described here is adverse to all *prayer*—a kind of interdict on fellowship with God. How can that fellowship be regularly maintained by a spirit that is ever liable to such perturbing excitation? We are commanded to "lift up holy hands, *without wrath* and doubting." We are commanded, "when we stand praying, to '*forgive*' if we have ought against any one." O how many barriers, then, must come between the man of pride and passion and "the throne of grace!" How often must the intercourse be interrupted!—how often must he be unable to bend the knee or to open the lip, in the presence of his God! And what a motive is this to seek divine aid to subdue the spirit of pride and anger, and to acquire that of calm and steady self-command!

## LECTURE LXXX.

—◆—  
PROV. XXVI. 1—11.

“As snow in summer, and as rain in harvest; so honour is not seemly for a fool. As the bird by wandering, as the swallow by flying; so the curse causeless shall not come. A whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass, and a rod for the fool’s back. Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit. He that sendeth a message by the hand of a fool cutteth off the feet, and drinketh damage. The legs of the lame are not equal; so is a parable in the mouth of fools. As he that bindeth a stone in a sling; so is he that giveth honour to a fool. As a thorn goeth up into the hand of a drunkard; so is a parable in the mouth of fools. The great God, that formed all things, both rewardeth the fool, and rewardeth transgressors. As a dog returneth to his vomit; so a fool returneth to his folly.”

THE two leading ideas in the comparison in the first of these verses are *incongruity* and *mischief*. “Snow” and “rain,” in the times of the year mentioned, were very *unseasonable*, and apt to prove very *injurious* to the prospects of the husbandman and of the country. Such cold in summer, when warmth was specially necessary for filling and ripening the fruits of the ground; and such wet weather in autumn, when drought was so desirable for in-gathering in proper condition, were alike unsuitable to their respective seasons, and at once ominous and effective of evil.—“So honour is not seemly for a fool.” The incongruity and the mischief are alike predicable, whether the *fool* be regarded as meaning the *weak* man or the *wicked* man. “*Honour*”—that is any situation of power, authority, and influence—is out of place when in his hands. The weak man will abuse such a position from *in-*

*capacity*; and he may thus even, without any evil intention, be the instrument of very serious and extensive harm. The harm may arise either from his own obstinacy in the refusal of suitable counsel,—for such obstinacy, alas! is no infrequent associate of *imbecility*;—or from his being made the dupe and tool of the artful and ambitious, the selfish and the cruel.

But the elevation of *wicked* men to such a position, is still more unseemly, and still more prejudicial, as all history might be cited to prove. When wickedness is set in high places, and endowed with resources at its own disposal for weal or for woe,—well may a nation tremble!

In the land of Israel, “snow in summer and rain in harvest” would have been regarded as indications of the displeasure of Jehovah.\* Such appearances were fitted to fill them with the fear that God was about to visit them with famine and “cleanness of teeth in their borders.”—So the advancement to honour and authority of wicked men—men devoid of principle—would have been with them, and is indeed with all, a presage of impending calamities.

Verse 2. “As the bird by wandering, as the swallow by flying; so the curse causeless shall not come.” There is difficulty here in settling the precise *point* in the comparison. The ordinary interpretation explains it with reference to curses pronounced by men without cause—imprecations, anathemas, that are unmerited:—and the meaning is understood to be—As the bird or sparrow, by wandering, and as the swallow, or wood-pigeon, by flying, *shall not come*,—that is, shall not reach us or come upon us in the way of injury; so is it with the *causeless curse*. It will “do no more harm than the bird that flies over head, than Goliath’s curses did to David.”† And it might be added, that, as these birds return to their own place,—to the nests whence they came, so will such gratuitous maledictions come back upon the persons by whom they are uttered. Thus God turned the curses into a blessing which Balak the son

\* See 1 Sam xii. 17, 18.

† Henry.



of Zippor hired Balaam to pronounce against Israel. Thus the malicious and hard-hearted curses of Shimei against David came not upon him, but fell upon the head of their unprincipled author.

I am not sure, though this interpretation has its difficulties, that a better can be given of the words. They *may*, however, refer, not to curses uttered by *men*, but to curses or judgments sent by *God*. The meaning *then* will be—that as the bird in flying *has an object*, and by flying *gains that object*, so the curse, or judgment of God, *never comes without a cause*. For every visitation of His there is a *reason*; and an *end* to be answered by it. It comes, in every case, in testimony of the divine displeasure, and for punitive warning and correction. Thus it was when “snow” came “in summer,” or “rain in harvest:” and thus it was when “the basest of men” were, in God’s providence, raised to power:—it was that they might be the scourges of His people, for their sins, and for their good.

According to the former view, the great lesson taught is that when exposed to the malice of men and their unmerited imprecations we should put our *trust in God*. According to the latter, that if we would shun “the curse,” or judicial infliction of the Lord, we must beware of everything that would provoke His displeasure: and that when His heavy dispensations do come, it behoves us to inquire what is their cause, and for what end they are sent; to ask, each one of us—“Why am I thus?”—“What meaneth the heat of this great anger?”—and to “humble ourselves under His mighty hand,” and sigh and pray for the attainment of the end He has in view. This second sense of the proverb appears to derive some countenance from the verse which follows:—

Verse 3. “A whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass, and a rod for the fool’s back.” The obvious import is—that correction suits “*the fool*,” even as the whip does the horse, and the bridle the ass. He requires the rod. Nothing else will do for him; nothing else bring him to his senses, or drive his folly from his heart; if even that proves effectual—“for a reproof entereth more into a wise man, than a

hundred stripes into a fool." I give the following, as the pointed application of the proverb to various characters by a judicious expositor:—"Are you," then, "the unhappy fathers of foolish children? You must make use of the rod and reproof to give them wisdom. Are you authorized to bear rule in the church? the rod of church discipline must be applied to offenders, that they may be reclaimed, and others warned. Are you magistrates? the rod which God has put into your hands may be a means of preserving young malefactors from the gibbet at a more advanced period of life. Are you wise? beware of turning aside unto folly, that you may never need the rod. Are you fools? learn wisdom, or do not blame those whom duty and charity will oblige to use the rod for your correction. Is it not better, that you should be treated by your superiors with love and in the spirit of meekness, than to be beaten with the rod? Are you obliged, for your faults, to bear the pains of church censure, or criminal law? Kiss the rod, and "sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto you." Have you formerly endured the rod? Let the impressions and effects of it abide with you for life, lest the sword of divine vengeance be unsheathed against you, because you refused to hear the voice of the rod and Him that hath appointed it."\*

Verses 4, 5. "Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit." In these two verses, there is the appearance of contradiction. But it is the appearance only. The principle of harmony seems to lie in the different senses of which the words "*according to his folly*" are susceptible.

The case is obvious. There may be folly both in the *matter* and the *manner* of the fool's talk. In neither must he be imitated. We must not bring ourselves down to his level. We must not debate with him in his own style—allowing him to get the better of our temper and self-possession. The evil of answering the fool according to his folly in *this*

\* Dr. Lawson.

sense, is stated in the end of the verse—" *Lest thou also be like unto him:*"—lest, that is, thou *pass for a fool like him*, sharing in the contempt that attaches to his character;—which is especially apt to be the case, when, in presence of those who do not know him, a man enters into the foolish, frothy, absurd, contemptible talk of the silly, the vain, the worthless,—chiming in with, encouraging and countenancing their folly, and seeming to relish and enjoy it:—or lest thou, *in point of fact*, really contract resemblance to him;—for by thus descending beneath the proper level, and conforming to such folly, there *is* a risk of contracting a littleness and silliness of mind; and, along with it, a trifling, talkative, contentious, wrangling spirit, and a manner destitute of all becoming dignity and respectability; producing the scorn of all who do, and the regret and pity of all who do not, know us.

Then, on the other hand, "*Answer a fool according to his folly,*" means answer him *as his folly deserves*. And this may be in various ways.—There may be occasions not a few on which *entire silence* is the most suitable of all replies. The fool's cavils and questions may really not be at all deserving of notice. As the danger mentioned, however, is "*lest he be wise in his own conceit*"—the silence in such cases requires to be accompanied with marked and manifest indications of its intention; otherwise, the very evil deprecated will be incurred. The fool will impute it to *inability*, and take credit to himself accordingly. This will give him a triumph, and settle him in his self-conceit. The same remark applies to *irony*, which may frequently be a sufficiently suitable kind of answer to the folly of the fool. It is a species of reply which has the appearance of conformity to the folly; but in reality is the reverse. Great care must be taken that the irony be such as to be *perceived*. If the fool himself does not see it, but takes the irony for earnest, it will then have all the effect of rendering him the more "*wise in his own conceit:*"—and if *others* do not see it, it will have the effect stated in the former, of making us appear, in their eyes, "*like unto him.*" Again, a petulant, captious caviller is not entitled to the respectful treatment

due to a sincere and modest inquirer or objector. It is well to be able, in such cases, so to point an answer, as at once to expose the ignorance or the malice of the caviller, and to put a reply out of his power;—thus setting him fast—making him *feel* his folly, and bringing down his self-estimation. This, however, we should be sure, is not done in any such way as would cherish in ourselves the very principle which we seek to repress in him—of petulance and self-conceit. That were to answer him “according to his folly” in the sense of the fourth verse, and “to be *like him*.” All our answers should be in *meekness* as well as *firmness*; and more in the spirit of *pity* than of *scorn*.

This ought especially to be attended to on *serious subjects*. There is a way which some have, when a person starts any objection on points of a religious nature,—bearing for instance on the truth of Christianity or the principles of the gospel,—of half angrily and half sneeringly, with a stern or a taunting rebuff, *putting him down*, by roundly telling him that what he says is *nonsense*, and unworthy of an answer. This, in general, is fitted to have one or other or all of *three effects*:—the excitement to resentful passions; the gratification of self-sufficiency and self-conceit instead of their repression; (for this kind of *knock-down* way of treating an argument or objection will of course be interpreted as indicating the consciousness of inability to meet it calmly and fairly;—) and the confirmation of scepticism and infidelity. Serious subjects should be treated seriously in all cases,—even with the fool. The best way to reply, is, not by a disdainful, jeering exclamation of “*absurd nonsense!*”—nor, by anything of the nature of buffoonery, trying to turn the laugh against the caviller: but to endeavour, in our reply, to unite such gravity and seriousness, as to show our deep impression of the importance of the subject, as one never to be trifled with or treated with lightness;—such force of argument as shall settle the question:—such determined firmness, as to rebuke and repress the spirit of self-conceit:—and such gentleness and kindness, as shall conciliate attention and candid consideration, and contribute to win the

heart. This last great object Christians are at times too prone to forget. Never should we imagine it sufficient merely to gain a victory on a disputed point. Our aim should above all things be, to gain the foolish, and even the conceited and impertinent, caviller himself—to draw him to a conviction of God's truth and a choice of God's ways. We should seek to make him sensible, by our whole manner, that we are in earnest,—that we are concerned for him, and anxious to convince him, for his own good, of his error and his danger.\* O! what is it, in the comparison—to have the credit of silencing an adversary, or to have the satisfaction of winning and saving a soul—saving a soul from death, and covering the multitude of sins!

Verse 6. “He that sendeth a message by the hand of a fool cutteth off the feet, and drinketh damage.” The general meaning of this proverb is too obvious to be mistaken by any one. Here again “a fool” may signify either a *weak* and *incompetent* man,—who has not capacity for the discharge of the trust committed to him, or one who is *unprincipled*,—on whose integrity and honour little reliance can be placed;—either the *senseless* man, or the *worthless* man, or a combination of both. He who commits any “message” to such a one “*cutteth off the feet*”;—is guilty of the same anomalous absurdity as if he were purposely to lame himself with a view to expedite his journey! The consequence which might be anticipated is expressed by Solomon in the words—“*and drinketh damage*.” he reaps, that is, as the reward of his absurdity and recklessness, disappointment, vexation, shame, injury, just in proportion to the magnitude and importance of the business.

Mark the *general lesson*. It evidently is—that we be careful, in all cases, to *select suitable agents* for the undertaking on which they are to be commissioned.

It is an important lesson for governments, in the selection of ambassadors, diplomatists, and provincial and colonial

\* This is beautifully exemplified on many occasions, in our Lord's interviews with his enemies:—See Mat. xii. 24, &c.; xv. 1, &c.: Luke xiii. 14—17: John viii. 7, &c.

magistrates;—to see that they be, in all respects, men competent for the trusts committed to them,—likely to execute them successfully, and in a manner that shall secure the honour and the interests of their country. It is a lesson to ourselves as the inhabitants of a free country,—to look well to it that we use conscientiously, considerately, and wisely, our *elective franchise*, and beware of committing the representative administration of our national affairs to men without principle or without capacity,—or holding such maxims of public policy as are, in our apprehension, at variance with the civil and religious liberties of the realm, or any of its other interests. It is a lesson to churches, in the choice of those to whom they commit the instruction and rule of the house of God;—to see to it, that they be men, in knowledge, in character, in temper, in prudence, and in energy, competent, as far as attainable, for “rightly dividing the word of truth,”—“watching for souls,”—“taking care of the church of God.” It is a lesson to both pastors and churches, in cases of discipline, or in any matters of general interest requiring the agency of individuals;—to see to it that persons be appointed, suitable in both disposition, and freedom from partiality and prejudice, and possessing the description of knowledge, whether sacred or secular, which fits them for the charge of the particular case. It is a lesson to *all*, in the ordinary affairs of domestic life, of secular business, of benevolent exertion;—to see to it, that according to the nature of what is to be done, they engage right *heads*, right *hearts*, and right *hands*.

Verse 7. “The legs of the lame are not equal: so is a parable in the mouth of fools.” This verse has by different critics been differently interpreted. One has it, “*Lift up* the legs of the lame”—“make the legs of the lame *to dance* ;”—“so is a parable in the mouth of a fool.” “A wise saying doth as ill become a fool, as dancing doth a cripple;—for, as his lameness never so much appears as when he would seem nimble, so the other’s folly is never so ridiculous as when he would seem wise.” The force of the comparison is, on this interpretation, sufficiently striking.

Another, from a different application of the same etymology, has the meaning—"the legs of the lame are wasted—emaciated—so is a parable in the mouth of fools." But this view seems unnatural and tame. The legs of the lame are not always wasted and slender. The meaning he attaches to the proverb is, that as the legs of the lame are slender and have lost their natural strength, so a parable in the mouth of a fool is deprived of its force. The explanation seems to rob *the saying* of much of its force. The idea certainly that is most readily and naturally suggested by the *legs of the lame* is that of *inequality*, and consequent inaptitude for sprightly or graceful movement. And in this sense the comparison is a very apt and expressive one. As the lame man, whose legs are not equal,—a short and a long, a straight and a crooked,—when he attempts to be nimble, is at once ludicrously awkward, and always in danger of falling; so is a fool awkward in the use of wise sayings, and is constantly in danger of stumbling into what is either ridiculous or mischievous, by his misapplication and abuse of them. "As therefore," says Henry, "it is best for a lame man to keep his seat, so is it best for a silly or a bad man to hold his tongue."\*

For the sake of the close resemblance of the sentiment, we shall take in here *verse ninth*,—"As a thorn goeth up into the hand of a drunkard; so is a parable in the mouth of fools." The meaning is precisely similar to that of the *sixth* verse. A fool handling the maxims of wisdom is like a drunken man handling thorns. The drunkard, not knowing what he is about, lays hold of them rashly and recklessly, and thus wounds himself:—so the fool wounds himself by his manner of using the sayings of the wise. He confirms his reputation for folly; he exposes himself to pity or scorn; or even, inadvertently, from not at all perceiving how the use he is making of some one of them re-

\* Stuart renders—"Take away the legs of a lame man; and so," &c. He explains thus—"The legs of a lame man are useless and may as well be taken away as respects any good from them. So a proverb in the mouth of fools is useless. It is a *lame* proverb."

coils upon himself, he pronounces his own verdict of culpability and condemnation; or still further, when attempting to bring a proverbial or pithy saying to bear on the support of his own cause, he blunders, by the misapplication of it, into a conclusion the very opposite of what he intended. He lays down principles that, in the eyes of every one who hears him, go to condemn himself, without his being in the least degree sensible of it. The thorn, ere he is aware, has "gone up into his hand," and the pain and the blood discover to him his folly.

Verse 8. "As he that bindeth a stone in a sling, so is he that giveth honour to a fool." This verse also has been variously rendered. In the margin—"As he that putteth a precious stone in a heap of stones, so is he that giveth honour to a fool." It seems to be generally agreed that the word translated *a sling* means more properly *a heap of stones*.\* And the word rendered *stone* is one frequently used to denote *a precious stone*.

It is not denied, that our English version gives a good sense. The man who "binds a stone in a sling" may be considered as *preparing mischief*. And so, the honour,—the power and influence,—that are bestowed upon a fool, only fit their possessor for doing hurt, either to himself, or to the person who has conferred it, or to others.† But the proper meaning appears to be—"giving honour to a fool, is like hiding a precious stone in the midst of a heap of stones:"—or like "*fixing* a precious stone in the midst of a heap."—One critic renders—"As a spark of precious stone in the midst of a heap of stones, so is giving honour to a fool." The ideas *then* conveyed are—that the honour does not *accord* well with the other parts of the character,—and that to all really useful purposes it is *lost*. To the expression of *incongruity* thus brought out some make an addition, by

\* Parkhurst, Schultens, Stock.

† Stuart retains the rendering of the English version, and explains, not inaptly, "It would be absurd to *bind a stone in a sling* and then expect it to do execution. Equally so is it to *bestow honour on a fool*, and expect any good consequences from it."



supposing the *heap of stones* to be such an heap as was usually reared or thrown over *notorious offenders*, who were stoned, or otherwise ignominiously put to death.\* This does certainly impart additional point and poignancy to the comparison. Giving honour to a fool is like inserting a diamond in a monument of infamy. The honour is thus worse than thrown away and lost. It is, in every view, where it ought not to be.

Verse 10. "The great God that formed all things both rewardeth the fool, and rewardeth transgressors." This verse so rendered, it cannot be questioned, contains an all-important and solemn truth. The fool and the transgressor shall come to punishment in the end,—shall "receive the due reward of their deeds,"—at the hand of God himself—"the great God who formed all things;" and who has power to punish as well as to save: "He can create, and he destroy." But *God* is a supplement; and in such circumstances the absence of the name of God, and the need of supplying it is very unusual. Here too you may look at the translation *in the margin*:—"A great man grieveth all; he both hireth the fool and hireth transgressors." The Septuagint is hardly intelligible. The French translation is substantially the same as our marginal:—"Great men cause offence, or grief, to all, and take into their service the foolish and the wicked." The Latin Vulgate gives a sense entirely different, which it is not easy to draw from the original—"Judgment settles causes; and he who imposes silence on the fool, allays contentions—or wraths." The meaning is probably that given *in the margin*. When a prince takes into his service ministers without capacity and without principle—"the fool and the transgressor,"—it is to his subjects matter of universal concern and trouble;—both because it is a sad indication of his own character; and because the administration of such men ensures to the country so many and so grievous evils. The sentiment, in this view of it, quite harmonizes with those in preceding and following verses.

\* See Josh. vii. 25, 26; viii. 29: 2 Sam. xviii. 17, &c.

And the lesson has application from the throne downwards through all the descriptions of subsidiary trusts. Extensive proprietors who employ overseers of their tenants, or of those engaged in their manufactories, or mines, or whatever else be the description of their property, should see to the character of these *overseers*. Their power may be abused, and multitudes of workmen suffer, when the owner—the master—knows nothing of what is going on. But he *ought* to know. Many complainings and *strikes*, well or ill-founded, have their origin here.\*

Verse 11. “As a dog returneth to his vomit, so a fool returneth to his folly.” The proverb is quoted by the Apostle Peter.† The emblem is a loathsome and sickening one. It is meant to be so. It would not have been appropriate, had it been anything else. There are *two* ideas conveyed by the comparison. The *disposition* or *tendency*, on the part of the fool or vicious man, to return to his folly; and the loathsomeness—the vileness—of the thing itself, when it does take place. There are persons of great pretensions to refinement, who affect great disgust at the comparison. They wonder how any body of ordinary delicacy can utter it. They would think their lips polluted by the very words. It were well for such persons to remember, that there is no comparison *so* odious as the thing itself which is represented by it. It were well if such persons would transfer their disgust and loathing at the figure to that which the figure represents:—if they would cherish a proper loathing of *sin*. That is what *God* holds in abhorrence:—that is what should be abhorred by *us*. Persons may affect to sicken at the comparison here used, and yet be themselves exemplifying the very conduct it so aptly represents. Folly and sin are incomparably more polluting and debasing to the nature of man, than the vilest and most disgusting practices in the

\* Stuart renders the verse, “An *arrow* which woundeth every one is he who hireth a fool and he who hireth vagrants:” and explains, “The man who employs fools and vagrants to do his work, and pays them wages, will injure himself.”

† 2 Pet. ii. 22.

physical nature of any of the inferior animals. O! to have the due impression of this!—such an impression as will produce a careful practical avoidance of those moral evils which are so offensive in the sight of God!

The proverb has a more especial reference to those sinners, who have been warned,—who have smarted for their folly,—who have, when thus made to feel its effects, professed their consciousness of its evil, and their sense of danger as well as guilt,—and who possibly, for a time, have refrained from it,—have vowed their favourite sins away from them, and seemed as if they were resolved not on confessing only but forsaking:—but who have shaken off their temporary convictions, and have returned, more eagerly than ever, to their former ways. Strongly are such characters depicted in some parts of Scripture; and terrible is the warning which the description of them involves.\* Beware, O sinner, of this fearful and fatal tendency. And let the professed people of God keep themselves aloof from all temptations to sin,—the sin especially to which they may before their conversion have been addicted. Let not the cup again touch their lips, lest the liking to it return, and they exemplify, as too many, alas! have done, the proverb before us!

\* See Mat. xii. 43—45: 2 Pet. ii. 20—22.

## LECTURE LXXXI

PROV. XXVI. 12—23.

“Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? there is more hope of a fool than of him. The slothful man saith, There is a lion in the way; a lion is in the streets. As the door turneth upon his hinges; so doth the slothful upon his bed. The slothful hideth his hand in his bosom; it grieveth him to bring it again to his mouth. The sluggard is wiser in his own conceit than seven men that can render a reason. He that passeth by, and meddleth with strife belonging not to him, is like one that taketh a dog by the ears. As a mad man who casteth firebrands, arrows, and death, so is the man that deceiveth his neighbour, and saith, Am not I in sport? Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out; so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth. As coals are to burning coals, and wood to fire; so is a contentious man to kindle strife. The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly. Burning lips and a wicked heart are like a potsherd covered with silver dross. He that hateth dissembleth with his lips, and layeth up deceit within him: when he speaketh fair, believe him not; for there are seven abominations in his heart. Whose hatred is covered by deceit, his wickedness shall be shewed before the whole congregation. Whoso diggeth a pit shall fall therein; and he that rolleth a stone, it will return upon him. A lying tongue hateth those that are afflicted by it; and a flattering mouth worketh ruin.”

How strong the expression in the first of these verses of the utter hopelessness of the self-conceited man! From what Solomon had just said of the fool,—and especially of his attachment to his folly and his proneness to return to it, we can hardly imagine a stronger:—“there is more hope of a fool”—yes, of a fool,—even of the man who returns to his folly like the dog to his vomit—“than of him.” The man who is thoroughly possessed with a high notion of his own superiority in wisdom and excellence,—*will listen to nothing.*

He is so encased in his self-sufficiency and self-esteem, that no advice, no reproof, no counsel, can reach him. He follows his own way, with a headstrong impetuosity, and a sovereign contempt of all who would presume to offer him any direction. All the wisdom of the wise goes past him, like the idle wind.

The simile in the *fourteenth* verse may mean, either that in the very way in which the sluggard turns himself there is indolence,—that he does even that lazily—in the way that requires least exertion:—or, that by his indolence everything like *progress* is precluded. In every employment, if employment he can be said to have, his indolence makes him *stationary*. The only motion he is able to bear, is the motion from one side to another upon his bed. And as even that cannot be made without *some* effort, he indulges in it as seldom as possible; and when on one side he has become uneasy, lies long *thinking* of turning, before he can bring himself to make the movement!

Even the exertion of eating is too much for him\* (v. 15). Having brought his hand from his mouth to the *dish*, he “hides” it there,—there lets it lie;—though hungry, and fond enough of his meat, “*it grieveth him*”—it is irksome, it is a weariness to him, to raise it again to his mouth! Thus the sluggard is lazy on his bed, lazy at his meat, and lazy at his work,—if he can ever be said to work. And yet—“The sluggard is wiser in his own conceit than seven men that can render a reason.” Ease is his chief good. There is nothing he can imagine better, than just to be let alone, and allowed to *do nothing!* He has his *theory* on the subject; and he holds it of all theories the best,—by far the most rational. The only exercise of his mental faculties with which he can be troubled is in behalf of the repose of his bodily powers;—to vindicate the propriety of ease and comfort—that is, according to his vocabulary, of idleness. *Arguing* implies perhaps rather more effort than he can be supposed to muster. Solomon

\* Comp. chap. xix. 24.

does not say of him that he will be at the pains to argue. A man may tenaciously hold his point, and hug himself in the full conviction of what his sweet experience—the experience of the delights of lassitude and quiescence,—tells him is right, without being at the pains to reason, or to attempt for a moment to answer the reasons of others. The sluggard sees men bestirring and troubling and fatiguing and vexing themselves,—and he hears them “*rendering reasons*” why they should be thus busy; reasons, to show the advantages of industry to the individual, to the domestic circle, and to society. The sluggard blesses himself; thinks his own way better; and with inward self-gratulation, turns him on his bed, and lies still. He is ingenious in finding reasons for his *not* doing what others bring reasons to show him he ought to do: and *his own* reasons are always the strongest. “Seven men”—that is, any number of the soundest thinkers and the wisest and ablest reasoners will argue in vain. He only thus exemplifies what discovers itself in multitudes of other cases, the extra weight that is given to arguments by their being on the side of inclination.

Verse 17. “He that passeth by, and meddleth with strife belonging not to him, is like one that taketh a dog by the ears.” The man who ventures to “*take a dog by the ears,*” will, in proportion to the fierceness of the animal’s temper, be in danger. When he has once seized him, his difficulty will be to get quit of him in safety. If he keeps his hold, he increases the dog’s fury, and the consequent risk of letting him go: so that he is at a loss what to do; and it is still the longer the worse. Thus the man who, hastily and intemperately, interferes in a quarrel, gets into a hazardous dilemma. He immediately discovers that it is something in which he had no business to intermeddle; he repents his rashness;—but once in, it is not so easy getting out again. Twenty to one if both parties do not turn upon him,—suspending for the moment their combat with one another, to assail the unbidden and unwelcome intruder as the object of their common resentment; as in the case of *two quarrelling dogs* and the man who injudiciously and in ignorance of the ani-

mals, attempts their separation. If the intermeddler takes the side of *one* of the parties he may provoke both; the one *against* whom he sets himself for a reason too obvious to need mentioning,—and the one *in whose favour* he intrudes, from the feeling of pride; because by such help thus imperintently given, he is robbed of the honour of the victory, or even of the credit of having at least enough of *pluck* in him to stand it out to the last. These are feelings of human nature; and may be alike experienced, whether the “strife” be one of blows or one of words—one of body or of mind—a fight or a controversy. Few men like either opposition or aid in such cases: and a man of spirit would rather have the former than the latter.

Are we never then to meddle?—Are we, in all cases, just to let strife go on?—to let the combatants fight it out, come what will? Assuredly not. There is no proverbial saying that has not exceptions. We must take the *general lesson* without pushing it to extremes. That lesson is sufficiently plain—that we should beware of taking part in quarrels with which we have nothing to do,—of thrusting ourselves in between angry disputants; of officiously and zealously interfering between those who have expressed no wish for an umpire in their strifes,—for advice or mediation. And it does not seem to be so much the case of the person who interferes for the purpose of separating the combatants that Solomon here means, as the person who, from his love to strife, is not satisfied with any quarrels he may chance to have, or choose to pick, of his own, but who cannot pass by a fray between others without having a hand in it.\*

Verses 18, 19. “As a mad man, who casteth firebrands, arrows, and death, so is the man that deceiveth his neighbour, and saith, Am not I in sport?” We take the *character* first; then the *simile*. It is the character of the man who imposes upon his neighbour by false or distorted representations,—leads him, by this means, into practical mistakes,—involving him in contentions, embarrassments, awk-

\* See chap. xviii. 6, 7; xx. 3.

ward scrapes, or even trouble and loss:—and then excuses himself by saying it was all *in diversion*,—he meant *no harm*—only a *joke*. This includes all that among ourselves passes under the cant term—*hoaxing*. The evil may of course vary in degree, according to the trivial or the momentous character of the deception. In some cases the aim and the result may be merely *laughable*; at other times they may be of a nature to render the agent culpable in the extreme,—being no joke to the sufferer, whatever they may be to him.

It is to the latter of these two cases that Solomon here refers. The *comparison* shows this. By the “mad man who casteth firebrands, arrows, and death,” much *harm* may be done,—harm to property, to health, to comfort, to life: and all is *sport* to the poor maniac. But in his case we have our apology ready. He knows no better. His disordered mind frees him from accountableness. We do not—we cannot blame him. But he who “deceiveth his neighbour, and saith, I am in sport,” does the maniac’s mischief without the maniac’s apology:—he acts like a man devoid of reason, but without the excuse of having lost it.

1. The *moral evil* of such conduct must be in proportion to the degree in which *truth is violated*, and in which a *malicious spirit is indulged*:—in proportion not merely to the mischief actually done, but to the mischief *intended*, and the amount of deception and falsehood practised to effect it.—2. Even in diversion *truth* should be held sacred. In no case should it be sported with. It is a serious mistake for people to imagine that they do no harm when they indulge in this kind of truthless jesting, either to *amuse* others or *make them stare*.—3. The sport is always hazardous; inasmuch as no man can ever have a previous certainty as to the precise length to which the results of this and the other of his *practical jokes* may go.—4. The evil and guilt are not a little aggravated when the deception is practised, and the mischievous tricks are played off upon the *weak* and the *simple*; when advantage is taken of their imbecility to turn the laugh against them, and to join in the laugh at their expense; and still more when they are exposed not to



laughter only, but to serious inconvenience and privation. There is *meanness* in this; and there is *wickedness*. It ought to be reprobated by every rightly-thinking mind and every rightly-feeling heart, with indignant severity. We pity and confine the maniac. We should scorn, condemn, and punish the unprincipled deceiver.

Verses 20, 21. "Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out; so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth. As coals are to burning coals, and wood to fire; so is a contentious man to kindle strife." In these verses we have *two characters* of frequent occurrence—the "*talebearer*" and the "*contentious man*." The two are often united; talebearing being just one of the ways of indulging and gratifying the love of contention.\* Observe—1. They "*kindle* the fires of strife." The effect of a tale of malice—of an insinuation of slander,—of even a single whisper of evil, is at times as amazing as it is annoying and injurious. When the little sting of some insignificant insect, of which the point is so small as to require a microscope to see it, has fairly pierced the skin, and lodged its virus in a puncture that is hardly discernible,—we marvel at the suddenness and extent of the effect produced, the inflammation and swelling that ensue in the surrounding parts, and the feverishness that is infused into the whole mass of circulating blood. Such is the effect of the secretly lodged venom of the talebearer's whisper!—Or, to keep by the figure before us:—it is like the striking of a single spark into the materials laid for kindling the largest fire.

2. They *maintain* the fires of strife. They kindle where there is *no* fire; they supply fuel where there *is*. They heap it on. They do their best to keep up the fire. And O! what delight it gives them if they succeed! Does the fire get low? Do the flame and the heat of mutual passion abate? They are alarmed:—it will never do to let the fire go out altogether. So they are at their post. Down they stoop, and quietly apply their breath. They blow, at first

\* Comp. chap. xvi. 23; xviii. 8; xx. 19; xxii. 10.

very softly, the glowing embers, and carefully lay on fuel, —little at a time, lest they should frustrate their purpose, and smother instead of inflaming; and when there is a fresh out-burst they inwardly exult, “walking in the light of their fire and of the sparks which they have kindled.” —There were some of God’s ministers of old, whose duty it was to keep the sacred fire always burning upon His altar:—*these* are ministers of Satan; and their unenviable office is, to keep up the accursed fire on the devil’s altar.

It is added of the same characters (v. 22.) “The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly.” The word in this verse rendered *wounds* is by not a few critics and translators understood as signifying what is *soft, gentle, sweet*, and is interpreted of the *insinuating* and *flattering* character of the talebearer’s words, —which, like dainties, there is a readiness to swallow.\* But they do their work—“they go down into the innermost parts of the belly.” Soft as they are,—sweet and gentle and the very opposite of injurious as they seem, they are pernicious. Like many poisons, they are tempting to the taste; but they are deadly. They destroy the mental peace and enjoyment of him *to* whom they are uttered: they destroy the reputation and the interest of him *of* whom they are uttered; and they destroy the friendship and the social happiness of both.

Verses 23—26. “Burning lips, and a wicked heart, are like a potsherd covered with silver dross. He that hateth dissembleth with his lips, and layeth up deceit within him: When he speaketh fair, believe him not; for there are seven abominations in his heart. Whose hatred is covered by deceit, his wickedness shall be showed before the whole congregation.” These verses all relate to *one* subject.—“*Burning lips*”—that is, lips burning with affection and officious warmth of zeal for your service, concealing malicious and wicked intentions:—such lips are as “*a potsherd covered with silver dross.*” A potsherd thus lacquered over is in

\* The Septuagint, Vulgate, and some other versions, agree in this rendering of the word.

reality as worthless as ever; although for the purpose of imposition, it is made to wear a deceitful exterior:—it is silver to the eye; but it is earthenware of the coarsest kind after all. So the heart of such a man is worthless, while his “lips burn.” The exterior and the interior do not correspond. And such men are only, on this account, the more dangerous. When a man honestly utters his mind, we know him, and are on our guard. But in the other case, we fancy we have got a friend when we have taken a serpent into our bosom,—when we have got only a worthless deceiver; a silver vessel in appearance, but a potsherd in reality;—lips of honey, but a heart of gall; or rather lips glowing with love, and a heart burning with enmity.

In the latter verse it is either assumed that we have some previous ground to suspect the man's sincerity; or it signifies that in his very manner—in his very style of “*fair speaking*” there is something which should make us suspicious and jealous of him,—his parasitical fawning and flattering being *overdone and out of nature*:—though it is not always so,—there being *some* dissemblers who have studied nature to the very life. At all events, in proportion as he becomes increasingly fulsome, let our suspicions correspondingly rise:—“*There are seven abominations in his heart.*” This may be understood, either as a very strong expression of the detestable odiousness of the character; (and in truth there is no character more deserving of entire abhorrence;)—the number *seven* being often used, both as to *evil* and *good*, with the sense of fulness, completeness, perfection; or, as every one of the deceitful and wicked devices of which his heart is the secret manufactory and storehouse, is an abomination—hateful to God, as opposed to the whole spirit of His law and character, and hateful in the eyes of all holy beings in creation,—the expression may mean that his heart is full of such unprincipled devices—plans and purposes of evil, concealed under the guise of friendship and love!

When, then, we *have* such cause for suspicion and jealousy, *what is duty?* Evidently, not to commit oneself to him,—to keep on the reserve—to say little—to have patience—to

wait and watch. For (v. 26) "Whose hatred is covered by deceit, his wickedness shall be showed before the whole congregation."—His falsehood and hypocrisy *will* come to light. His sin *will* find him out. He will by and by betray himself. Circumstances will occur to detect and expose him, and render him the object of public and merited infamy. The very circumstance of his finding you incredulous and distant, and not immediately yielding to him, may, through the very power of chagrin and irritation, provoke the disclosure of what has been within. And when this disclosure comes, with what shame is the deceiver covered! Not Christian morality, merely, but even the conventional virtue of the world, agree to banish such a man from society with indignant reprobation, whether his devices have succeeded or failed.

And more than *shame* will be his portion:—Verse 27. "Whoso diggeth a pit shall fall therein; and he that rolleth a stone, it will return upon him."—"Digging a pit" for another is planning schemes of evil against him. The providence of God not seldom makes these schemes ultimately productive of mischief to the *schemer*. The figure in the verse evidently means that as there is a constant tendency in the stone that is rolled up to return and come down upon him that rolls it—so is there a tendency in the devices of deceit—in the secret plans of mischief—to bring evil in the end to the wicked author of them. In both cases, there is *constant effort and constant risk*. The framer of evil must keep his hand vigilantly and unremittingly to it; else in some unguarded moment it will come back with disgrace and ruin upon himself.\*

In the next verse we have still the same subject. The "*lying tongue*" corresponds with "*the flattering mouth*," for hypocrisy, slander, and flattery are very common associates.\* The falsehood and calumny are produced by hatred, and are the manifestations and expressions of it:—but there is in them, at the same time, a tendency to increase and confirm it:—"The lying tongue *hateth* those that are afflicted by it."

\* Psa. vii. 14—16; xix. 15; lvii. 6; Eccl. x. 8.

1. There is the inward self-reproach, arising from the workings of conscience, from which arises a secret irritability and fretfulness and unhappiness:—and this produces dislike of the innocent occasion of it; instead of terminating (as it always ought to do) on *self*. This of course is only *more injustice*. True; but it is in human nature to hate with a bitter hatred the object of our own crime; as if it were a fault in that object to exist, and so to be the object on which our sin terminates.

2. The evil passions, like the good, are strengthened and increased by their exercise. If the utterance of the feelings of love serves further to inflame love,—the utterance, in like manner, of the feelings of hatred tend to inflame hatred. The passion gives birth to the word and the action; and, reciprocally, the word and the action strengthen the passion.

3. The fretful uneasiness produced by the unceasing apprehension of detection and exposure, already alluded to, and of the weight of *his* vengeance who is the object of the lying tongue's assaults, gives rise also to the same feeling of rankling dislike to him who is the source of it. Thus the slanderer, instead of feeling pity for the man whom his slander wounds, hates him still the more. This appears to have had a very striking exemplification in the case of our blessed Lord and his Jewish unbelieving adversaries. They "hated him without a cause." They uttered their spiteful reproaches; and the very utterance of them irritated and confirmed their malignity. They were angry that they could not find a cause to justify their hatred. The more they reproached and maligned him, the more were their reproaches belied by the unimpeachable purity of his whole conduct. And they hated him with the keener dislike, that they could not tempt him to give them the slightest ground for their reproaches. Their "lying tongue" thus "bated *him* that was afflicted by it." For he *was* afflicted by it. This was part of his sufferings. In prophecy he is represented as saying—"Reproach hath broken my heart." He "endured the contradiction of sin.

\* See chap. xx. 19.

ners against himself." And the greater portion of venom they discharged upon him, there was the more abundant secretion of it within.

As to the "*flatterer*"—he is the most dangerous of characters. He attacks at points where men are naturally most successfully assailable; where they are most in danger of being thrown off their guard and giving him admission. And when by his flatteries he has thus got the mastery, then follows the execution of the end for which they were employed—"*working ruin.*" The expression is strong; but not stronger than experience fully justifies. It often *works ruin* to the most interesting characters—characters admired and worthy of the admiration,—by infusing a principle that *spoils the whole*—the principle of vanity and self-conceit. They thus lose their loveliest and most engaging attraction. And whatever be the selfish object of the flatterer, his selfishness obtains its gratification by the ruin of him whom his flatteries have deceived.

## LECTURE LXXXII.

—◆—  
PROV. XXVII. 1—7.

“Boast not thyself of to-morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth. Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips. A stone is heavy, and the sand weighty; but a fool’s wrath is heavier than them both. Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous; but who is able to stand before envy? Open rebuke is better than secret love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend: but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful. The full soul loatheth an honey-comb: but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet.”

THERE is often a marked and melancholy inconsistency between the admissions which men make and the course of conduct which they pursue. The uncertainty of life, and the uncertainty of the events of its successive days, who can possibly question? It is necessarily and universally granted. It has been the settled and traditionary maxim of all generations. Who contradicts the assertion—“*Thou knowest not what a day may bring forth?*” Yet, admitted as this is,—unquestioned since “by one man sin entered into the world and death by sin,”—men have, ever from that day, been “*boasting themselves of to-morrow*”—*thinking* confidently, *talking* confidently, and *acting* confidently, on the credit of to-morrow!—ay, and not seldom of much longer periods than to-morrow!

Of the uncertainty of life and of its enjoyments, how many solemn and touching lessons we receive! Among the first tidings I heard on my return home two days ago, was the sudden and affecting death of one of our number, who left his wife, the partner for twenty years of his joys and sorrows, in good health and cheerful spirits, to walk, and to bathe

in the river; and, after but an hour or two of agonizing suspense beyond the wonted time of his return, the sad intelligence was borne to her that herself was a widow and her children fatherless! Distressing, but apt illustration of the words before us! O learn from them, and from such sad events, the folly of trusting to the certain continuance, even for a day, of life and of life's blessings, and let the admonition be taken home, in reference to life's *duties*. Let nothing be left till "to-morrow" that *can* be done and ought to be done, to-day,—“Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest,” Eccles. ix. 10. Thus let us “redeem the time,”—jealous of allowing one moment of it to slip, remembering especially that in matters which pertain to the well-being of others, there is *unrighteousness* as well as folly in such delay, and that in those which are connected with the glory of God and the interests of his cause there is *impiety*.

And I would anew press on all an earnest and affectionate caution against the most ruinous of all descriptions of procrastinating confidence in “to-morrow,”—the delay of attention to the concerns of the soul and a coming eternity. *Not now, but by and by*—is the prevailing maxim here;—a maxim which few pretend to justify, but on which the vast majority persist in acting;—a maxim, of which all grant the folly in words, and by the admission condemn their own practice. Alas! my friends, how many souls has this procrastination ruined! Many a time are the sad consequences of delay exemplified and felt in regard to the affairs of this world. And O that men would but apply the salutary principles on which such affairs ought to be conducted to the interests of the world to come! Yet how frequently may you hear a diligent, active, prudent man of business warn the young against the evil of procrastination, and address to them most admirable lessons for their conduct in life, yet himself acting on the very principle he condemns, respecting interests incomparably more momentous;—the very solicitude about the secular, one of the causes of



procrastination as to the spiritual and eternal! How often may you see such a man—while he would not, in any one instance if he could help it, leave the value of a farthing to the contingencies of “to-morrow,” putting off to all the uncertainty of days and years to come, and leaving to “the mercies of a moment” the happiness of an endless existence! Strange infatuation!—and the *impiety* is not less than the infatuation. With peril to men’s selves, there is insult to God. It may be true, that many *yesterdays* are gone by, which were once “*to-morrows*”—and it has, in divine providence, so turned out, that your anticipations of them have not been disappointed. You have “boasted” of many of these “to-morrows,” and they have still successively come;—and the very coming of one has tempted you to trust still more confidently for another. And yet you *know*—you know perfectly—that the past is no security for the future. You know, that, in multitudes of instances, the *to-morrow* to which *others* trusted has never arrived, and that in *their* case the trust has proved a delusion. You know, that in your own case, the “*to-morrow*” must come that is to be your last, and that is to close your mortal life. You know that the God of your life has an imperative claim upon you every successive day—a claim as imperative on your heart and your time and your powers *to-day* as it will be “to-morrow;” and that every *to-day* and every *to-morrow* which you allow to pass and to become a *yesterday* without having given it to Him, or done in it what He commands you to do—accepted His mercy and entered on His service,—carries with it a charge against you to the judgment-seat, and waits your arrival there as a witness against you. You know that delay only hardens evil principle, and gives the world the faster hold of you! *You know all this*—O then “be wise TO-DAY!”

Verse 2. “Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips.” “Self-commendation,” it has been said, “is the prerogative of Deity.” When God reveals himself to His creatures, it cannot be otherwise, if the discovery be according to truth, than as

the infinite concentration of all excellence—of all that is great and all that is good. And it must, at the same time, be, as the source to His creatures of all their joys, and to each one of His intelligent offspring the chief good.

The language before us implies that we should seek to *possess the excellences* that are fitted to commend us to favour, and so to draw forth the approbation of others; we ought to seek these qualities, not, as is too apt to be the case, for the sake of the praise they are likely to secure, but *for their own sakes*, and for the sake of what the apostle calls “commending ourselves unto God.”

It must never be forgotten that all such passages imply the sincere and earnest cultivation of a real and divinely approved *principle*. The principle called for in this verse is that of true, self-diffident modesty. Considerations entirely different, and even opposite, may induce the suppression of *self-praise*:—even the very desire of praise from others. From this arises the danger of holding out—to the young especially—the motive or inducement of *getting a character for modesty*. This may produce artifice, affectation, simulation, hypocrisy. That which is wanted,—that which God approves and requires,—is *honest simplicity*, which neither, on the one hand, courts praise, nor, on the other, affects to disdain and undervalue it,—which neither blusters out its own commendation, nor whines and simpers, and depreciates, and makes light of what it is or of what it has done, merely for the purpose of making others say more. The affectation of despising the commendation of others is worse than the self-commendation that is reprehended. It is, in truth, the very same spirit showing itself under another aspect.

There may be occasions when a man not only *may with propriety*, but *must in duty* speak in self-commendation. He may be falsely accused,—reproached and vilified. Men may “say all manner of evil against him falsely,” and “lay to his charge things that he knows not.” The self-vindication which, in such circumstances, becomes incumbent upon him, for the sake of his profession and of his usefulness,

must to a certain extent include self-commendation. But in these cases, the *manner* of it will show the *motive* and principle by which it is dictated.

Verse 3. “A stone is heavy, and the sand weighty; but a fool’s wrath is heavier than them both.” Of the unprincipled or irreligious man, who is, at the same time, weak and not governed by reason or discretion, “the wrath” may be expected to be disproportionate, ungovernable, furious, destructive. The figure may be differently understood. It may be taken from the weight of a burden,—or, so far as the *stone* at least is concerned, from its coming down with mischievous violence on its hapless object. The anger even of a good man may at times go beyond due bounds, in degree and in its working and results;—as when David, in his rage against Nabal, threatened the destruction of all that pertained to him. But in general, the passions of the wise and good will be restrained and moderated by the operation of right principle,—by conscience towards God, and by the influence of God’s truth. But “*a fool’s wrath!*”—there is no telling to what extremes it may carry him, while the storm rages; or what mischief it may effect in its sudden and frantic transports. The mischief will be in proportion to his power of doing it.

Yet as the next verse indicates, there is a passion which, in Solomon’s estimate, was still worse than uncontrolled anger. That—“cruel,” “outrageous,” and productive of serious damage, though it be, lasts not long. Like the violent tempest, it speedily spends itself; and by prudent, patient, conciliatory treatment it may be softened. “*But who is able to stand before envy?*” *Envy* is one of the most malignant principles in our apostate nature. It is the principle that grudges at the well-being of others. It is a stranger to all generosity of feeling. It differs, in this respect, from *virtuous emulation*. The latter is satisfied that others should keep, in the scale of prosperity or of honour, the point they have attained, while it strives to surpass and to rise above them. It indulges not the mean desire of gaining equality by the degradation of its rival, or seeks to bring that

rival down to its own level by low and insidious arts. But *envy* is a stranger to honour. Let but the hated distinction be done away, it matters not to envy *how*,—whether by its own rise or by its rival's fall. Nay, it sighs for the latter quite as earnestly as it aspires at the former. It only “consults to cast down the object of it from his excellency;” and will condescend to the most despicable devices for the accomplishment of its purpose. The very considerations that would soften anger and resentment, tend to the *increase* of envy; because they procure for its object the greater share of approval and commendation. Even at the excellences by which these are obtained envy grudges; so that by the very means which would disarm wrath of its propensity to cruelty and outrage, you infuse fresh venom into the stings of envy; you promote the secretion of its virulent and deadly poison.

It may be remarked too that “anger” and “wrath,” with their cruelty and outrageous violence, are *open* as well as transient. We see them, and we can shun them. But *envy* mines in secret. It is ever sapping and working under ground. It perseveres in its perfidious occupation with a patience and assiduity worthy of a better principle and a better cause. And the mine may burst upon you, with destructive violence, ere ever you are aware of what it has been busily and darkly doing; and involve you in ruin without a moment's warning. This is envy's highest, sweetest, richest gratification. It gloats in delight over the successful result of its deeply laid and secretly prosecuted schemes. And yet, well is it designated “the rottenness of the bones.” It is its own tormentor. It brings down its rival; but its very gratification is its misery. The very sympathy which that rival meets with torments it:—and itself becomes the object of contempt, desertion and loathing, and brings upon it the curses of mankind. “As the devil,” it has been well remarked, “fell by his *pride*, so he wrought the fall of man by his *envy*:—and when envy takes possession of a man, it makes him a devil to his neighbours.” The devil had no provocation from man:—and so the envious man works without provocation. The object of it does nothing to excite it,

—and often has no suspicion of it till the effects of its hellish working come upon him. Who, therefore, can “stand before it?”—It was *envy* that murdered Abel, and dyed the earth with the first blood of innocence. It was *envy* that plotted against Joseph,—consulted to put him to death,—sold him into bondage,—dipped his hated vest in blood, and presented it to the eyes of his distracted parent,—thus slaying at once the fraternal and the filial affections in the bosoms of its subjects. It was *envy* that delivered up to condemnation and death the Lord of glory, the prince of life, the pattern of benevolence, and purity, and every divine and human excellence.—O! if we cannot help being its *objects*, let us beware of being its *subjects*. Let us cultivate every sentiment that is opposed to it; and, instead of grudging at the happiness, or the honour, or the excellence of others, delight in that generosity of heart which makes every stream of others’ joy tributary to the river of our own pleasures!

Verse 5. “Open rebuke is better than secret love.” Our first enquiry here is,—What is the contrast, or antithesis, which Solomon, in this verse, intends?

It is not, I apprehend, between “open reproof” and love that is *not real* but only *affected*, and, assuming the garb and manner of what is real, *flatters and imposes upon its object*. This could not, with propriety, be called “*secret love*.” It is not love at all. It is *professed* love, but *secret enmity*, or at least *secret indifference*, making professions for ends of its own. “*Secret love*” is love which is indeed real, but which fails to speak out faithfully when it ought—when the good of its object calls for such fidelity; which shrinks from doing so because it is unwilling to inflict present pain; which thus connives at existing evils,—silently allowing them to pass, when they are such as ought to be noticed and reprehended. This is that false love, which really injures its object; and which, on this account,—that is, from its injurious *tendency*, how little soever designed, gets in the Scriptures the designation of *hatred*: “Thou shalt not *hate* thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him,” Lev. xix. 17. This is far worse than *of*

*no service.* It is eminently prejudicial. It can never be a favour—unless under a fearful misapprehension of the term,—to have *sin* allowed to remain in us. Surely it is far better to be without the sin, than to be without the “*rebuke.*” To *remove sin* ought to be regarded by every child of God as the highest aim, and the most desirable influence, of love. It is the highest aim of *divine* love. It is the end of that love in the whole mediation of Christ; and its end too in the entire administration of providence,—especially in all afflictive dispensations. These are divine *rebukes*; and they are every one of them corrective,—intended to make God’s people “partakers of his holiness.” “By this also shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged;” and “this is all the fruit, to take away sin.”

It is to be feared, that there is often not a little of *selfishness* in the “secret love” which is here condemned. We shrink from rebuke, more on account of the unpleasantness and trouble of it *to ourselves*, than on account only of the pain to which it may put our neighbours. Two things are pre-supposed, however, in the verse; that the rebuke is really *deserved*; and that it be invariably administered in the right spirit—the spirit of *love*. The rebuke required must not only be *open* and *faithful*, but affectionate and humble, in order to its being effectual, and thus proving itself “better than secret love:”—for it is better not to rebuke at all, than to rebuke in a bad spirit.

Verse 6. “Faithful are the wounds of a friend: but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.” The sentiment in this verse, though analogous to that in the fifth, is not the same.—By the process of probing and searching a wound or a sore, and by the subsequent process of cutting, a surgeon may subject a patient to great pain. But it is not because he has pleasure in putting to pain that he inflicts it; but because the health and strength of his patient, his qualifications both for action and enjoyment, perhaps his very life, depends upon his proceeding as he does. Thus his wounds are “*faithful*”—professionally faithful. Their design is not to inflict suffering, but to prevent and remove it. In the same way,

friendly fidelity and reproof may give mental pain,—acute, severe pain. But the wounds, like those of the surgeon, are necessary, for *spiritual* health and strength and life, —or, it may be, according to the nature of the case, for temporal comfort and benefit. We have already remarked, that such is the design of our heavenly Father's corrections. *His* wounds are faithful. They are all in perfect harmony with the promises of His covenant, which are assurances of love. Faithfulness is an attribute of love, and love is an attribute of faithfulness. We can neither be faithful without loving; nor can we love without being faithful. And if we would be affectionately and truly faithful, we must at times *wound*;—always when there is sin to be reproved.

The antithesis to the faithful wounds of a friend is—“*But the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.*” These are the kisses of one who feigns friendship. We had the character drawn at length in the preceding chapter:—verses 23—26.

Seek you an evidence of the wounds of a friend? You have it in Nathan's faithful execution of his commission to David, when, after his sin in the matter of Uriah, he delivered to him the parable of the ewe-lamb, and then came home upon his slumbering conscience with the emphatic and pointed charge, “*Thou art the man!*” Would you know how deep and painful the wound which was thus inflicted? Read the *fifty-first Psalm*. See him there offering to the God whom he had offended the sacrifice of a broken spirit;—and hear him pleading for mercy, and deprecating divine rejection. Ah! the wound went deep. It inflamed and rankled. But how salutary! It was the *faithful wounds* of the Lord and his prophet that restored his soul, and brought him back to God and to the “joy of his salvation.”

And for the kisses of an enemy, look at the conduct of Joab and of Judas—of Joab, when, taking Amasa by the beard to kiss him, he said, “Art thou in health, my brother?”—and “smote him under the fifth rib:”—of Judas, when he said to Jesus, “Hail, Master! and kissed him;” and with the same breath of faithless treachery, turning to the ruffian band—“Take him, and lead him away safely!”

Verse 7. "The full soul loatheth an honey-comb: but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet." Who has not experienced the truth of these words? When the appetite is fully satisfied, that which otherwise would be most relished, becomes nauseous, and is ordered away. An appetite too that has been pampered,—vitiating and cloyed by luxury and delicacy,—is seldom a good one. It has no taste for plain, wholesome, nourishing food; and even the dainties and factitious stimulants to which it has been accustomed lose their effect and leave it craving for something new.—*Hunger*, on the contrary, gives relish to every thing,—to the plainest, the most homely, and even the most unpleasant fare. What the nice and dainty epicure,—or the man of self-indulgence, would turn away from with disgust, is to the poor toil-worn labourer a meal of high enjoyment.

The manna in the wilderness was sweet; "like wafers mixed with honey:"—but the Israelites had plenty of it, and they got dissatisfied with it, and longed for variety,—“Our soul,” said they, “loatheth this light bread—who will give us flesh to eat?” How different the feelings of the poor, starving prodigal, when “no man gave unto him,” and “he was fain to fill his belly with the husks which the swine did eat!”

There is a *general principle* evidently involved in the proverb. It is this:—that value will be set upon any object, in proportion as the want of it is felt. And this principle applies, with full force, to *spiritual* as well as to temporal concerns. The proud and self-sufficient, who are full of themselves, and who feed on their self-flatteries, and feel no want, loathe even the rich provision of the gospel feast,—“the feast of fat things and wines on the lees, of wines on the lees well refined.” They turn away from this heaven-furnished table. There is no *spiritual appetite*. But when a poor sinner comes to be sensible of his own emptiness—his utter destitution of all that is good, of all that can satisfy his conscience and recommend him to God,—and begins to “hunger and thirst after righteousness,” a righteousness which he has not in himself,—then nothing *but* the provision made



by the gospel can satisfy his longing soul. And when he has accepted the free invitation to that feast,—to that open table,—he finds there the fulfilment of the assurance—“he shall be filled.” And yet he comes to the experience that the viands there provided are such as never cloy the appetite; but only, the more abundantly they are taken, whet it the more. The fuller, the hungrier.

At the same time, in another sense, abundance is apt to engender nicety. We are in danger of thinking lightly of our spiritual enjoyments, and spiritual privileges, because we have them in so great plenty and variety,—and of becoming very particular and very nice as to the manner of their being prepared and served up to us. O the difference between this state of things and the eagerness with which little portions of the word of God are received, and occasional passing opportunities of hearing it valued, by those whose means are more stinted than ours! The man who has long fasted, and is starving of hunger, will not think much about the cooking, the seasoning, the dish, or the garnish. Let us “take heed to ourselves,” that we do not cherish any such squeamish nicety,—any such spiritual epicurism,—as would blunt our relish for the plain and wholesome truths of the simple gospel. It is on this, after all, that the soul, in its spiritual powers and affections, must become strong; and by these must its vigour be maintained, and its growth in the divine life advanced.

## LECTURE LXXXIII.



PROV. XXVII. 8—10.

“As a bird that wandereth from her nest, so is a man that wandereth from his place. Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart; so doth the sweetness of a man’s friend by hearty counsel. Thine own friend, and thy father’s friend, forsake not; neither go into thy brother’s house in the day of thy calamity: for better is a neighbour that is near than a brother far off.”

On the first reading of the eighth verse it appears a mere *truism*. Here are *two wanderers*. The bird is a wanderer; the man is a wanderer. But surely *this* cannot be all that is meant. Whatever be understood as meant by a man’s “*place*,”—the comparison cannot, most assuredly, consist in the *mere fact of wandering*. There is a manifestly intended reference to the *pernicious results* in the two cases respectively;—of the straying of the bird “from its nest,” and the absence of the man “from his place.”

And again:—the “*nest*” might be regarded as, to the bird itself, the place of rest, repose, tranquillity, comfort, safety. But, although, in this view, there might be points of comparison instituted perfectly just and sufficiently appropriate; it is not, I apprehend, to considerations of this description—considerations of personal ease and convenience and security to the man himself, that the comparison is intended to apply. The nest is, no doubt, a place of warmth, and retirement, of comfort, and safety to the bird, yet it should be borne in mind that these are not the *ends* for which the nest is built. No bird sets about constructing a nest, as a mere dwelling for itself,—to which it may retire, when fatigued

by flight, and lie upon down, and enjoy itself in peaceful and luxurious ease. The nest is built, on the impulse of the wonderful instincts of nature,—instincts implanted by Him, of whom the simple bird knows nothing, but whom those instincts should teach *us* to adore,—for very different purposes. The nest is the place where the eggs are to be laid; where they are to be warmed and quickened into life; and where the young unfledged progeny are to be lodged, and fed, and protected, and trained to their maturity. Now, in such a comparison as this, we cannot but suppose there is a reference to the *purposes* for which the nest is constructed. The allusion is doubtless to the period of *incubation*—to the hatching of the eggs, and the rearing of the young. If the bird “wanders from her nest” during that period, what is the consequence? Why, that the process is frustrated:—the eggs lose their vital warmth; they become cold, addled, and unproductive. Absence, even for a very short time, will produce this effect; and produce it to such a degree, that no subsequent sitting, however constant and prolonged, can ever vivify again the extinct principle of vitality. And then, during the period of *early training*, when the young are dependent on the brooding breast and wing of the parent bird for their warmth, and on the active quickness of the parent bird, as their purveyor, for their sustenance,—desertion is death. If the mother *then* “wanders from her nest,” forsaking for any length of time her callow brood—they perish, the hapless victims of a mother’s neglect. They are starved of cold, or they are starved of hunger; or, it may be, their secret retreat is found out by some devouring foe.

Such appears to be the apt allusion. Let us now consider *to what cases it may with truth and profit be applied.*

1. In the first place then, I apply it to a man’s HOME. Home may surely be regarded as most appropriately designated “*his place.*” It is there he ought to be; not merely *enjoying* comfort, but *imparting* it;—not the place of selfish ease and indulgence, but of dutiful and useful occupation. He has a charge there,—committed to him, not by the in-

instincts of nature merely, but by the law of God. His family demand his first interest and his first attention. His fond caresses and endearing smiles are to teach them the reciprocations of love; his counsels, instructions, admonitions, and encouragements, are to form their minds for the usefulness of future life; his example is to confirm what his precepts inculcate; and his active industry is to provide for their wants and their comfort. The man who is never easy at home; never settled in the very place of which settlement is the characteristic distinction; who is ever restless, and eager to roam; who is abroad only at home, and at home only abroad, and fancying he will be better elsewhere;—that man is a poor miserable creature himself; it is not in the nature of things that he can carry happiness with him anywhere. And alas! for the rising family of such a wanderer,—so unnatural an *absentee* from the place which of all others has a title to his presence. Nothing can go well at home, when the heads of the family do not find it the place of mutual rest and comfort, of social delight and useful occupation, and fond attachment, and common cares and common joys. Their rising offspring are neglected—neglected not only in what regards their external provision and comfort, but especially in the most important of all points—the early culture of their minds and hearts. If others than their restless, home-sick, wandering parents care not for them, it is a poor time they have of it, and a poor prospect in looking forward. I have said the *heads* of the family:—for although the text speaks of “the *man* that wandereth from his place,” the spirit of the proverb applies, alike truly and alike forcibly, to both. An idle, roaming, gadding, gossiping mother, is indeed, in respect of the mischief produced by such a course to her family, fitly compared to the *hen* bird that leaves its nest,—its eggs to addle, its offspring to starve! The mother who is a stranger at home was never meant by nature to *be* a mother. She is an anomaly in the animal creation. And they who give her any encouragement and countenance in her restless roving, give her encouragement

and countenance in what the word of God, in the very severest terms, censures and reprobates.

Do not push my similitude too far, and suppose that I am condemning under it *all* going from home. It would be foolish to say that a man must never choose a calling that requires his occasional absence from the domestic circle. But such absence on business may be aptly likened to the short but necessary absences of the parent-bird from its nest, when her object is the provision of food for her young. Her *leaving* the nest becomes, after a certain period, as indispensable as her *keeping* it. Were she to remain always *in* it her brood would starve, as effectually as if she remained always *out of* it. But in such absences, her flight is rapid, and her return quick;—the absence no longer than is absolutely necessary for effecting her purpose, providing sustenance for the nurslings of her instinctive care. The nest is still her *home*. So should it be with every parent; and so *will* it be with every dutiful parent, to the utmost extent attainable.

2. I apply the proverb to the SITUATION IN LIFE which has been assigned to a man by Providence. A change may, in some cases, be not only warrantable but imperative. It may be so constrained by circumstances as to be itself as really an act of obedience to providential intimation, as it had been to enter on the situation relinquished. The words of our text are intended to repress a fickle, mutable, roving tendency of mind in regard to a man's employment. The disposition to such change should not be indulged. There are men who are ever after something *new*. They enter on a situation with all the eagerness of sanguine anticipation, and with the full assurance and purpose of its being permanent. But they quickly tire of it. They find it does not suit them. There is that about it they don't quite like. They get dull and disheartened, and wish a change. They make the change; and O how pleased they are! But it is still only for a time. The same weariness, and itching for change recurs. Now the man who is thus fitful and unsettled, ever dissatisfied, and ever "wandering from his place," is not very

likely to prosper. How *can* he? No business gets a fair trial. He quits it before there has been time for it to assume a matured form, or to work itself into a course of steady prosperity. He is like the bird that gets impatient of her incubation, and gives not the time required by nature for the eggs to quicken and mature,—or for her brood, when hatched, to arrive at the time when they may shift for themselves: or like a bird (could we fancy such a thing) that should spend her spring and summer, in going about from place to place, building nests, and leaving them as soon as built!—We may, with equal propriety and force, apply the proverb to *fits and starts of labour* in the situation a man continues to fill. He ought to *keep steadily to his occupation while he is in it*. No man's business can prosper otherwise. It will be as unproductive as the incubation of the wandering bird.

And allow me especially to observe, that this steadfast application is indispensable in the case of the man *whose occupation is in the service of another*. In such a case, it is required by faithfulness and integrity. He who is thus engaged is not at liberty to leave his engagements at his own option. It is his incumbent duty to be *at his post*. His time is not his own. It is a sad thing when any *Christian* gives his employer occasion to say of him that he “wanders from his place,”—that he does not mind his proper business; that he is never sure of being found where he ought to be. As the brooding bird should be found upon her eggs, or with her young, so should every servant, in every department, be found in his own place, and at his own occupation. It should be the aim of every man to have it said of him with truth—*Tell me where he ought to be, and I will tell you where he is*.

3. I wish to apply the words to the SANCTUARY OF GOD. I think they may be so applied with perfect appropriateness. Every Christian must delight in God's sanctuary. It is to him, as a worshipper of God, “*his place*,”—the place where, at stated times, he ought to be, and where he chooses, and desires, and loves to be. How frequently, how strongly, how beautifully, does the Psalmist express this feeling!—

and on one occasion with an exquisitely touching allusion to those birds of the air, that built their nests in the vicinity of the temple; and which,—when banished from Jerusalem and kept at a distance from the sacred precincts,—he represents himself as envying—coveting their proximity to the altars of Jehovah.\* When *he* thus “wandered from his place,” it was not by his own choice. His heart was there. All his desires, all his affections were there. Thither they ever pointed, like the disturbed needle, still, in all its vibrations, settling towards the pole. That is the point of its magnetic attraction; and so is the sanctuary to the soul of the child of God. On the hallowed day of sacred rest, this is “*his place*.” Here will he be found, “beholding the beauty of the Lord and inquiring in his temple.” The business of religion,—the concerns of the soul, will not thrive, if a man be ever “wandering from his place,” any more than the business of the world and the concerns of this life.

Now, brethren, to speak plainly, I wish to be understood at present as meaning, not merely that you should, on the Lord’s day, be *in the sanctuary*—that is, in *some* place of worship; but that you should, as regularly as possible, be in *your own* place of worship. Every member of a Christian church has his own place; and there, generally speaking, he ought to be found. This is seemly. The practice of wandering from place to place indicates a want of stayedness of mind,—a kind of spiritual gossipping,—fondness for variety, and novelty, and change—“itching ears.” It looks like treating the house of God rather as a place of intellectual or spiritual *entertainment*, than of serious devotion and divine instruction.

Were the system of wandering really a *profitable* one, I should grant that the text did not admit of a just application to it; for the wandering of which the text speaks is one that is prejudicial and destructive. But in this respect the application is strong. A desultory and ever-changing system of hearing,—one sermon here and another there,—

\* Psalm lxxxiv. 1—4.

one minister this Sabbath and another the next,—will never be at all so profitable as a regular continuous course of sabbatical instruction. Besides, those who have chosen *their own* “pastors and teachers,” should feel it their duty to *encourage them*. Few things, you must be well aware, can be more *discouraging* to a pastor than when hearers, and more especially any of his own flock, are thus unsteady. It unavoidably gives him the impression of dissatisfaction on the part of these absentees—these wandering spirits. He sighs over the apprehension,—not that he fails to please merely—that were little—but that he fails to *interest* and to *edify*. And it may not seldom happen, that, when he has been at special pains with a particular subject, which he has conceived to be needful for a particular class of his hearers,—he sees, to his mortification and regret, that the very individuals perhaps to whose character, or case, or circumstances, the discourse was peculiarly adapted, are not present! They have “wandered from their place:”—and thus the double evil is produced, of *their* losing the benefit, and *his* losing the satisfaction of imparting it, and one of the objects that stimulated his mind in study, and animated him in the prospect of the Lord’s day service. His affectionate faithfulness misses its principal aim.

Some of you may probably have been thinking with yourselves, that while I have been speaking of the duty of the Christian *people*, there is no individual to whom, in the churches of Christ, the words of the text are more directly and strongly applicable, than *the pastor himself*. I grant it. It is unquestionably the duty of those who have the stated instruction of the brethren intrusted to them, not to be wanderers from their respective places. Their own charges ought to be their constant care. Yet the people should beware of *unreasonable extremes*. While it cannot but be a gratification and an encouragement to a pastor to know that his people do not *wish him away*,—still they should remember that, while their own churches are their primary charges, pastors still may have duties beyond them,—duties connected with the *general interests and prosperity of the denomination of*



*Christians to which they belong*, and, what is still more important, of *the cause of Christ in general*. On this account, he should not be regarded as “wandering from his place,” when ends of this description are connected in any way with his absence. He is *in his place*; just where he ought to be:—and his brethren, instead of murmuring, should approve and encourage. There is another consideration which may be pleaded; that an occasional absence may prove conducive to that health and vigour that are necessary to the efficient fulfilment of their home labours,—and that the sight and intercourse of other pastors, and other churches, tends to impart not only a pleasing and profitable spiritual excitement, but also information, and experience, and enlargement of mind and heart, that are eminently conducive to the same end; and thus good for their people as well as for themselves. They should not, therefore, on every occasion of absence, be compared to the “bird that wanders from her nest” in brooding time; but rather to the same bird, when it wings its way, fleetly and briefly, to cater for its own. If the pastor is, in body and mind, the better for his absence, so are his people proportionally benefited. In serving others, he serves *them*.

Allow me here to put in a word in behalf of *young preachers of the gospel*. Nothing ought to be a source of greater pleasure to the hearts of the people of God, than to see youthful piety consecrating itself to the service of the sanctuary, and of the truth and kingdom of the Redeemer;—the Timothys,—the rising hopes of the church and cause of God. Under this impression, it should be their anxiety to hail their appearance, to encourage them, to cheer them on in their course, making every allowance for early imperfections, receiving their instructions with affectionate candour, and showing them all the countenance in their power. I cannot but look upon it as unkind, selfish, and sinful, to discourage the hearts and weaken the hands of youthful ministers and preachers, by “wandering from your place” when they are expected to officiate. Tell me not of the duty of attending to your own edification. I grant the duty. But

if there is an humble frame, and a real, spiritual, lowly desire to *be* edified, you will rarely miss it, in some degree or other. And should the degree at times be small, forget not that the wrong you do to others by your absence may be much greater than the negative wrong you do to yourselves by your presence:—and, having myself, in my day, known by experience the feelings of a young beginner in the service, I cherish for them a kindly sympathy, and plead for them with a corresponding earnestness.

Besides, brethren, you must not forget, that it is not merely to *hear sermon* that you come to God's house,—*your place* on His holy day. You come to hold fellowship with His people in all the social exercises of devotion. You come to remember and celebrate along with them the dying love and the triumphant resurrection of the “Lord of glory.” It is becoming and desirable, that you should be found, as regularly as possible, doing this in company with those in whose communion you have, from principle, felt it your duty to unite.

I may be permitted to make a special reference to the *ordinance of the Lord's supper*. O why should any, on that interesting occasion, be found “wandering from their place.” That it is where they ought to be the authority of the New Testament determines, and their own professions admit. Truly, when they thus absent themselves, may they be likened to the “bird that wandereth from her nest.” They lose benefit to themselves, and they inflict injury upon others. They deprive their fellow-believers of a part of the benefit as well as delight of the social commemoration of their common Lord, and the united and cheering anticipation of his second coming; and they thus so far contribute to dishearten and weaken them by depressing in their bosoms that “joy of the Lord which is their strength;” as well as distract their minds by painful misgivings and fears. Like the swallows or the ring-doves, then, that found their nest at the altars of God, be you *there* from Sabbath to Sabbath, duly as the day returns, unless when necessarily prevented. Eat and drink there of the provision made for you; and assure your own

and each other's hearts before your Lord, in the joint remembrance and celebration of His love. "Wander not from your place."

Brethren, there is one place to which you have come for safety and for happiness. That place is CALVARY. It is *your place*, as believing sinners. O wander not thence. You will then indeed be "as a bird wandering from its nest." Beyond the sacred precincts of that holy mount,—the mount on which "the Lamb of God took away the sin of the world,"—all is danger, all is ruin.

Verse 9. "Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart; so doth the sweetness of a man's friend by hearty counsel."—This verse does not seem to be very happily rendered, although the sense may be considered as substantially given. The Vulgate Latin has it—"The heart is refreshed by ointments and perfumes; and the soul is soothed by the good counsels of a friend." Another version has—"Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart; so doth the counsel of a man's friend sweeten the soul." The comparison is, plainly, that of the influence of good counsel, kindly administered, upon the mind, to the refreshing and cheering effect of the fragrance of rich perfumes upon the sense and upon the spirit. This is especially felt in times of trouble and in seasons of difficulty and perplexity. When the heart is heavy and depressed, and the mind troubled with conflicting and distracting thoughts,—how soothing is the salutary counsel of a judicious and affectionate friend!—how does it sweeten the embittered, and settle the agitated spirit! Such was the effect of the sound and divinely approved counsel of Jethro upon the spirit of Moses, when overburdened and oppressed with the multitudinous cares of his office as judge of Israel:—and such the effect of the counsel of Jonathan to David,—the counsel of a friend that "loved him as his own soul,"—when he was harassed and kept in dread of his life by the persecuting malice and envy of the frantic Saul:—he "strengthened his hands in God," and set his heart at rest. O! that friendship and its hearty counsel were sweet indeed, amid the bitterness of David's outcast condition!

Surely, we may apply the comparison, in all its emphasis, to the *counsel* that directs the awakened and alarmed sinner,—whose spirit is pricked and embittered by a sense of sin, and whose heart sinks within him under the apprehension of impending wrath,—to the grace of the gospel—to the cross,—to the way of salvation,—to the rich and free mercy of a covenant God in Christ! What ointment and perfume can diffuse so sweet and soothing a fragrance, as *that* counsel diffuses, through the believing soul! O my friends, this is truly of all counsel the best. The counsel that brings the troubled sinner to Christ and to God,—that introduces into his heart a sense of pardoning mercy and paternal love, is indeed “as ointment poured forth!” It imparts to the soul an unceasing source of comfort and joy.—And such too is the counsel that sends the desponding believer back to the same simple and blessed truth that gave him peace and joy at first. Not, indeed, if his despondency is the effect of *indulged sin*, and that sin unrepented of and unforsaken. To speak of grace to such a man would only be to add to his delusion, and ultimately to augment the bitterness and oppression of his spirit. It is false friendship indeed; as false as the pretended friendship of the father of lies, when, under promise of an increase of blessing, he tempted to the deed which brought the curse.

We take the two parts of the following verse distinctly—“*Thine own friend, and thy father’s friend, forsake not.*” Forsake not, that is, a friend that has “shown himself friendly” both to thy father and to thyself for his sake:—a steadfast, unswerving friend; one who maintains his affection to the living, as he did to the dead. This is parallel to the “friend that sticketh closer than a brother.” Such a friend, principled, steady, and self-denying, is indeed a treasure,—not to be parted with on trifling grounds, but to be kept with care as we would guard a precious jewel. In the designation there is a double bond of attachment:—“*Thy own—and thy father’s friend.*” There is the twofold appeal to *gratitude* and to *filial affection*. And when that affection has been enshrined and hallowed by the death of the parent,

all the sacredness that attaches to a parent's dust and a parent's memory comes to be associated with the friendship of which he was the object when living. To forsake such a friend becomes thus a kind of sacrilegious violation of the claims of filial devotedness and duty.

“*Forsake him not.*” Forsake him not *in his time of need.* To forsake him then would justly stamp your character with an indelible stigma of ungrateful baseness. Forsake him not, by neglecting and undervaluing his *counsel*; and forsake him not by declining his *kind offices*. To a truly generous spirit, there are not many things more *hurting*—more deeply and tenderly wounding, than this. Even if we should see good cause for declining to accept what we are not satisfied would be really beneficial—even then, the intended kindness should be declined with grateful acknowledgments, and gentle unwillingness to offend. And to refuse the proffered services of such a friend, when he is desirous to serve us as he did our fathers,—to tell him in effect that we can do without him and will dispense with his interference,—is to inflict a wound that may go deep and rankle long,—not, it may be, resentfully, but in the spirit of mortified kindness, that has intended and attempted good, but has been slighted. And forsake him not, on your *rising yourselves in life*;—on your mounting, it may be, to a higher level in society, than that which he and your father before you occupied. It may not be in your power to raise him with you. But it were sadly wrong, and unworthy of correct principle and right feeling, so to leave him beneath you, as to forget him and let him feel that he is forgotten,—to allow his kindnesses to slip from memory, and to decline recognizing him, as now below your status in life.

“*Neither go into thy brother's house in the day of thy calamity.*” This has certainly the appearance of a very strange advice. Whither, in the day of our calamity, should we go, if not to the house of a brother? Where are we to expect a kind reception, and the comfort we require, if not there? But the proverb, like all others, must be understood generally, and applied in the circumstances and the sense

obviously and mainly designed. The meaning seems to be—either:—1. Do not choose “the day of thy calamity” for making thy visit, if thou hast not shown the same inclination to court and cultivate intimacy before, in the day of thy success and prosperity. This unavoidably looks not like the impulse of affection, but of felt necessity, or convenience and self-interest:—“Ay, ay,” your brother will be naturally apt to say, “I saw little of you before: you are fain to come to me *now*, when you feel your need of me, and fancy I may be of some service to you.” Or—2. Let not sympathy be forced and extorted. “In the day of thy calamity,” if thy brother has the heart of a brother, and really feels for thee, *he will come to thee*; he will *seek and find thee*. If he does not,—then do not press yourself upon his notice, as if you would constrain and oblige him to be kind. This may, and probably will, have the effect of disgusting and alienating him, rather than gaining his love. Love and sympathy must be unconstrained as well as unbought. When they are either got by a bribe, or got by dint of urgent solicitation, they are alike heartless, and alike worthless. The reason is—

“*For better is a neighbour that is near, than a brother far off.*” The antithetical phrases “*at hand*” and “*far off*”—have evident reference here, not to *locality*, but to *disposition*. A friendly and kindly disposed neighbour, who bears no relation to us save that of neighbourhood, is greatly preferable to a brother,—to any near relation whatever that is cold, distant, and alienated.

Even natural affection requires to be exercised with discretion. When appealed to injudiciously—at improper times—in improper circumstances, and with improper frequency—it may be cooled—it may be lost—it may be turned to dislike. On the other hand, however, there is a danger of a *selfish exclusion* of a brother “in the day of his calamity,” as well as of a selfish solicitation on such a brother’s part;—and against that tendency we have reason to be guarded, as well as against the other.

## LECTURE LXXXIV.

—◆—  
PROV. XXVII. 11—20.

“My son, be wise, and make my heart glad, that I may answer him that reproacheth me. A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself; but the simple pass on, and are punished. Take his garment that is surety for a stranger, and take a pledge of him for a strange woman. He that blesseth his friend with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, it shall be counted a curse to him. A continual dropping in a very rainy day and a contentious woman are alike. Whosoever hideth her hideth the wind, and the ointment of his right hand, which bewrayeth itself. Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend. Whoso keepeth the fig-tree shall eat the fruit thereof; so he that waiteth on his master shall be honoured. As in water face answereth to face; so the heart of man to man. Hell and destruction are never full; so the eyes of man are never satisfied.”

THE oft-repeated admonition in the first of these verses, “My son, be wise, and make my heart glad,”\* is here enforced by a new consideration:—“*That I may answer him that reproacheth me.*” O how happy a thing it is to a Christian parent, when, with delighted though humble confidence, he can point to his children, as a silent but convincing testimony to his faithfulness in the fulfilment of his trust, and a refutation of every malicious insinuation and charge to the contrary! True, indeed, every parent will be disposed, in lowliness of spirit, to acknowledge that in this, as in all other things, he has “failed and come short of the glory of God.” Yet no satisfaction can be more exquisite to a parent’s heart than that which arises from the practical proof, of diligence, fidelity,

\* See chap. x. 1; xv. 20; xxiii. 15, 16; xxiv. 25.

affection, and prayer, in a family growing up “in the fear of God;” and proving a credit to him in the eyes of others;—“The *father* honoured in the honoured *son*.”

The *principle* of the verse may be applied to *spiritual fathers* and *spiritual children*; and to the relation of a *pastor* and his *people*. It cannot fail, on the one hand, to be a source of delight to him, when he can point to his spiritual children and to the people of his charge, maintaining full consistency of Christian deportment,—“abhorring that which is evil, and cleaving to that which is good,”—as the most convincing evidence of the purity of his doctrine and the faithfulness of his ministrations;—and a sad unhappiness to him, on the other, when the enemy finds occasion for “reproach” in their many inconsistencies, and deflections from the way of God’s commandments.—It may even be applied to the case of *Heavenly Wisdom* herself, teaching by the word. She is “justified of her children;”—and the most satisfactory reply to all insinuations against the doctrines there taught, as leading to licentiousness, should ever be, a simple appeal to the lives of those who believe them.

The two following verses are an exact repetition of the third verse of chap. 22d, and the sixteenth verse of chap. 20th; to which the reader is referred.

In verse *fourteenth*, the words, “*it shall be counted a curse unto him,*” do not mean that his “friend” will be apt to *curse him* for it; but rather, he shall be reckoned *as if he cursed his friend*. The character intended is evidently that of the man given to flattering and laudatory adulation. The reference is to public, extravagant, unceasing, unseasonable, commendation. The man is supposed to *make it his business* to praise another,—day after day, and all the day long—proclaiming his excellences to all, and taking precious care, at the same time, that he himself shall hear!

To a man of any real modesty this will be painfully irksome,—insufferably offensive. It is putting him on the rack,—torturing his spirit. And further, such conduct is sure to produce either ridicule and laughter at the expense of the object of such overdone commendation; or envy and



jealousy, with the inevitable results;—a system of detraction to counteract the praise; or a leering insinuation that the parasite is secretly encouraged and in pay for his flattery; or too high expectations from him who is thus lauded to the skies, and consequent disappointment;—it being, on this account, a serious disadvantage to any one, to be held up as a public prodigy by the extreme of eulogy. A wise man will prefer reviling and reproach to the disgrace of being thus befooled with flattery. And the flatterer, instead of being liked and encouraged, will be *disliked*, and held at a due distance, as one who is to be suspected of unworthy motives,—one who in bepraising others is only looking after his own interests.

The subject of next verse has also come repeatedly before us; and it certainly has no such attractions as to tempt one to repetition: “A continual dropping in a very rainy day and a contentious woman are alike.” but the sixteenth verse presents a new view of the same topic;—“Whosoever hideth her hideth the wind, and the ointment of his right hand, which bewrayeth itself.”

A prudent man, who has regard to his own and his family’s respectability, as well as his wife’s reputation, will be anxious to *cover*, as far as possible, her temper and behaviour, and the unpleasant differences and outbreaks thence arising. But alas! the attempt is vain. The utmost meekness, discretion, and caution, will not do. Her own unruly and wayward temper will, in spite of all, bewray itself. The attempts will be like endeavours to *hold the wind*, or to *retain in the hand the smell of a fragrant and volatile ointment*. The more closely the hand is pressed, the more will its warmth disengage the odour. So, the efforts of gentleness and calmness to mollify and to conceal may have the very opposite effect,—provoking all the more to openness, from resentful disdain, and the very love of contradiction—exposing *herself*, for the express purpose of disappointing and fretting, and mortifying *him*!

O far be all such scenes as these from the firesides of professedly Christian families! Heaven is the home of love

and peace. And there must be love and peace here among those who are looking forward to that home;—where the blessed inhabitants “neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven.”

Verse 17. “Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.”—It would be wrong to say that this verse, as it stands in our translation, conveys no distinct idea. “*Sharpening the countenance*” does convey an idea. We immediately think of a man’s face being *enlivened* and *emboldened*; and we infer that the enlivening and emboldening of the *countenance* arises from the enlivening and emboldening of the *spirit*,—and that this has been the effect of the man’s *standing by* his friend—supporting and encouraging him. Still, the words appear much more natural and emphatic, when rendered—“*So doth a man’s countenance sharpen his friend.*”

By a very common figure, we use the word *countenance* for encouraging approbation, support, incitement. When a man is left to think and determine and work *alone*,—especially when it so happens that he has no firm confidence in the scheme itself about which he is engaged, or in the method by which he is prosecuting it, or in his ability and resources for carrying it through,—he gets flat and spiritless. His wits are blunted. They lose their keen edge and efficient energy; so that they do not serve him with their wonted acuteness and promptitude. In these circumstances, let a friend step forward, and take him by the hand; let him approve and smile on his undertaking, and offer his co-operation in forwarding it;—what a change! He is like another man. His spirits revive. His wits are *sharpened*. He proceeds with eager assiduity and cheerfulness, putting forth all his powers, and making corresponding progress toward a successful issue.

There is a *general principle* here. It is—that all individual and solitary application has a tendency to *languish*: whereas social exertion keeps up its life and spirit, by the influence of mutual excitement. This appears in childhood and youth—in the effect of a well-directed emulation: and

on the same principle are founded all the institutions of *social religion*, in which the truth of the maxim is signally experienced.

Verse 18. "Whoso keepeth the fig-tree shall eat the fruit thereof; so he that waiteth on his master shall be honoured." There is here *encouragement to servants*,—to all who, in whatever department or way, are in the employ of others. The comparison is a sufficiently obvious one. The sweet and luscious fruit of the fig-tree is the reward of the pains and labour bestowed upon its cultivation. He who plants and waters, who prunes and dresses it, will in due time eat of the fruit:—so honour, confidence, reward, advancement, will be the result of a servant's diligent and faithful attendance upon his master; while, if he acts otherwise—neglects his master's business, follows his own inclinations, wastes his time, loiters on his errands, does his work indolently and inefficiently, to the prejudice of his master's reputation and interest, he must look in vain for such "honour." Then nothing is his due but disgrace and dismissal. See to it then, ye servants, that with the *encouragement*, you bear in mind the *duty*. And ye masters, be sure that ye overlook not the lesson *to you*, (which, if not so directly expressed, is so manifestly implied,) and, while you look for the *duty*, forget not the *encouragement*:—by which I mean, not merely the payment of wages punctually and fully when they are due;—but the smile, and look, and expression of approbation, and the occasional bestowment, when work has been done in an exemplary manner, of some little more substantial token of satisfaction,—some little extra reward.

And let us not forget the application of the words to ourselves as the servants of Christ. He is, both to servants and masters, a *perfect* example. In discharging his trust, in the former relation, as the voluntary Servant of his Father, he was faithful to Him that appointed him. His language was,—language in perfect harmony with truth, "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work"—"My meat is to do the

will of him that sent me, and to finish his work." And in his relation to his people as a Master, he "sends no one a warfare on his own charges." He demands no work but what is rightfully due. He is large in his promises. He smiles graciously upon active fidelity; and He will prove himself generous and liberal as well as just, in fulfilling his engagements. "Hath he said, and will he not do? hath he spoken, and will he not make it good?"

Verse 19. "As in water face answereth to face; so the heart of man to man."—Calm bright water is here considered as a mirror. The countenance reflected from it is the counterpart,—the exact image of the reality:—"so the heart of man to man." What means this? I. There are certain principles and feelings in our nature common to all mankind. Not it may be in the same degree; but still so universal as that every man may, to a certain extent, judge of others by himself. If there are exceptions, they are so rare as only to *confirm the rule*. These principles and feelings remain the same, amidst all varieties of situation and character. Take for example *parental affection*. When God says, "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him," He proceeds on the assumption of fond and strong affection being the *generic character* of the paternal relation. Hence, one father may know from what his own heart feels what the hearts of other fathers feel. The same holds true, in a special manner, of *self-love*, in all its various modifications. It has certain universal likings and dislikings, desires and aversions. Every man prefers being loved to being hated,—being well-spoken of to being slandered,—being honourably dealt with to being cheated,—being the object of respect and kindness to being the object of *disrespect* and *unkindness*. This may not strike you as of so much importance as it really is. Remember the great "golden rule," or "royal law," is based upon it. Were there no such general correspondence of feeling and desire, how could this rule be possibly applied? This golden rule of equity and love, then, is founded on the fact that "as in water face answereth to face; so the heart of man to man."

2. In regard to the character of the *unrenewed*,—it may be, and it is, greatly modified by constitutional temperament, by peculiarities of education, and by the diversity of circumstances in which they are placed;—yet, in the great staminal principles and essential features, their characters are very much alike. The substantial sameness, or identity, is discernible amidst all the diversity. *Their* likings and dislikings, their desires and aversions, their passions and propensities, are all closely akin to each other. So that, by observing in what manner *corruption*, in certain circumstances, operates in one, you may shrewdly and pretty surely estimate its operation in *all*. While the ambitious man loves power, the avaricious man wealth, the licentious man pleasure, and the one may not enter into the estimates and desires of the other in the precise particular on which the heart of each is set,—still, there is in them all one element of character, in which “there is no difference.” They are all “of the earth, earthy.” They are all “after the flesh;” and “minding the things of the flesh.” “They are all going astray,” under the influence of a common principle of rebellion and ungodliness, although each goes astray “in his own way.” They all understand one another, and sympathise with one another, in the general feelings which they cherish. All cast in the same common mould, their features have undergone different descriptions of modification and distortion. There is the family sameness, and the individual varieties.

3. In like manner with regard to the *new nature*—the spiritual nature of the regenerate,—the children of God. *It* too is the same; so that “as in water face answereth to face,” so doth the heart of one child of God to another. There is much variety, no doubt; yet there is a great deal of general, and even of minute and exact correspondence, in their views and their feelings. Their experience may be diversified in its details; but it is the same in its general principles. The spiritual conflict, though subject to many varieties, is, in its essential nature, alike in them all. It is the “flesh lusting against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh;”—“the law in the members war-

ring against the law of the mind." They all know this; they all feel this. Bring them to their knees together; and let any one of them be the mouth of the company in prayer to their common God and Father,—what a sympathy is immediately felt! In the confessions, the deprecations, the intercessions, the petitions, the thanksgivings, they are "of one heart and of one soul." They adore a common God; they love a common Saviour; they live by a common Spirit; they own a common unworthiness and guilt; they trust in a common atonement and a common mercy; they draw their supplies from a common fountain; and on a common ground anticipate a common heaven.

"Their fears, their hopes, their aims are one,  
Their comforts and their cares."

In the sentiments of humble self-renunciation, and "glorying in the cross,"—in gratitude for the Lamb's redeeming love,—in love to all that are His,—in zeal for God's glory,—in joy in the conversion of sinners to Him,—in delight in His word, His day, His ordinances, His worship,—in the feeling and acknowledgment of their constant proneness to "depart from the fountain of living water," and in their entire and incessant dependence on grace and obligations to it,—where is the individual dissentient? When one believer breaks out into the song, "O to grace how great a debtor!" where is the other believer, whose emotions do not correspond,—whose pulses do not beat in unison? The Christian, then, who watches his own heart, and attends closely to its secret movements, will, generally speaking, be no great stranger to the hearts of his fellow-christians.

From this cause it arises, that men, in hearing particular sermons, take fancies, as they many a time do, that the preacher has been hearing something *about them*; that some one has been giving him information. He has only been sketching from nature; and the sketch has met their consciousness. He has been describing a *genus*; and the description has been found to suit the individual. This has

especially been the case, when the workings and tendencies, —the inward thoughts and desires of our common corruption have been faithfully and vividly delineated. It has then not seldom been very difficult to convince particular hearers, that a sermon has not specially been aimed at *them*.

There is one point in which the verse cannot hold true. There is a wide and essential difference between *the regenerate* and *the unregenerate*. The latter are altogether incapable of entering into the views and feelings of the former. Hence the unrenewed man is startled and astonished at the terms of self-annihilation and self-loathing in which the renewed man bemoans himself before God. He can neither understand it nor sympathise with it. He thinks if all that his godly neighbour says of himself be true, he must be *bad enough with a vengeance*. The reason is, that he is an entire stranger to the standard by which the renewed man estimates his character. He has never brought himself to the test of the holy heart-trying law of a holy heart-trying God; and has never seen himself in the light of the cross. Let him only be convinced of sin, and renewed in the spirit of his mind—and *all will be plain*. Then he will see clearly what puzzled and perplexed him before. Then he will enter into feelings which before he could not even imagine. Having received the vital principle of the new nature,—all its peculiar sentiments and emotions, its regrets and its sorrows, its estimates of self and its estimates of God, of sin and holiness, of this world and the next, its love and its hatred, its fear and its hope, its aversions, its aspirations, its longings,—all will immediately become his own:—and his only wonder now will be, that he should ever have thought and felt otherwise than he does,—otherwise than *they* did whom before he could not comprehend. *Now*, “as in water face answereth to face,” so does his heart to theirs!

Verse 20. “Hell and destruction are never full; so the eyes of man are never satisfied.” “*Hell*” or *Sheol*, means *the place of the dead*: and having this *general* meaning, it has come to be used with different *particular* meanings according to the connexion in which it occurs:—sometimes for *the*

*separate state*—the *invisible world*; sometimes for the *grave*; sometimes for the *place of torment*.—“*Destruction*” may here be considered as signifying—by a species of personification—all the variety of ways taken together by which men are removed out of the world,—or as meaning “the second death”—the pit of woe. It is sadly true of both the *grave* and *hell*, that they are never “*full*;”—the word is the same as that translated, in the other clause of the verse, “*satisfied*,” and might, in both occurrences, be well rendered *sated*. Generation after generation are swept into the grave; and of each successive generation the vast majority, alas! goes down to hell,—the vast majority living and dying without God. Thus the *tomb* and the *pit* are *never sated*.

And “so the *eyes of man* are *never sated*.” The *eyes*, by a very natural figure, are put for the *desires*. Upon that which is the object of our desire, we *fix our eyes*; and that with an intensity of settled eagerness proportioned to the degree of the desire.\* The meaning, then, is not merely that the sense of *sight* never has enough of its own peculiar enjoyments, but that the *desire that is by the eye expressed* is never satisfied by any amount of present gratification.† The desires of men are insatiable. They set their hearts on some particular object, and long for its attainment. They fix in their mind some point of advancement in the acquisition of the world,—some measure of wealth, or of power which they think, if once realized, would satisfy them to the full. They get what they want; but they still long as before. There is ever something unattained. Having gained the summit of one eminence, they see another above it; and as they mount, their views widen and their conceptions and wishes amplify, and still more is required to fill them.

There is one thing and one only that can fill and satisfy—really and permanently satisfy—the amplest desires of an immortal mind. *They* possess it who can say, “THE LORD is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup;” and

\* See for example—chap. xxiii. 5.

† Compare, for a similar sentiment—Eccl. i. 8; Eccl. ii. 10, 11.



who can continue to sing, even amid the desolation of all that is earthly in their lot—

“Should I this spacious earth possess,  
And all the spreading skies,  
They never could my thirst appease,  
Or yield me full supplies.

Without my God, with all this store,  
I should be wretched still;  
With thirst insatiate, crave for more,  
My empty mind to fill!

But when my soul's of God possessed,  
What can I wish for more?  
Here let me ever fix my rest,  
And give all wandering o'er!

When the affections are “set on the things that are above;” when the chosen treasure is in heaven, and the heart is there also; when the eye of delighted contemplation is fixed on the glories and beauties of the “better country, even the heavenly”—the “inheritance that is incorruptible and that fadeth not away,”—this moderates the desire of earthly things. The eye ceases to fasten on them with its former avidity, having found a more powerful attraction—being drawn and fixed by something better. And then, when riches “make to themselves wings and fly away,” instead of the sight being strained in gazing wistfully and painfully after them in their flight, it is directed to the “better and more enduring substance:” it “enters through the gates into the heavenly city,” and settles on the fulness of its glory and joy.

## LECTURE LXXXV.

—◆—  
PROV. XXVII. 21—27.

“As the fining-pot for silver, and the furnace for gold; so is a man to his praise. Though thou shouldst bray a fool in a mortar among wheat with a pestle, yet will not his foolishness depart from him. Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks, and look well to thy herds: for riches are not for ever; and doth the crown endure to every generation? The hay appeareth, and the tender grass sheweth itself, and herbs of the mountains are gathered; the lambs are for thy clothing, and the goats are the price of the field. And thou shalt have goats’ milk enough for thy food, for the food of thy household, and for the maintenance for thy maidens.

THE ordinary interpretation of the words in the first of these verses makes the *praise try the man*. But the words in our translation, and in the original, make *the man try the praise*:—and this appears to be the correct interpretation. Of the comparison two views may be taken:—

I. It may express what every man, with reference to the praise bestowed upon him, *ought to do*:—that is, he ought to do with it what the “fining-pot” does to the “silver,” and the “furnace to the gold.” He should *try it well*. There is a deal of dross frequently in it; and men are apt to be fonder of the dross, in some of its appearances, than of the sterling metal. Let the following rules, then, be attended to:—First, reject as dross all *fluttery*: it is worthless: it springs from false and selfish motives.—Further, use the “fining-pot” for all praise that is bestowed by persons who are in the habit of talking extravagantly, of

using complimentary words without being very nice or considerate in weighing their amount of meaning. If you don't, you are sure to take them at a great deal more than they are worth.—Again, be very cautious in receiving without abatement all that is dictated by the known partiality of friendship. It may all be sincere, and all well-meant, but it requires refining. It will not all pass with others, though the partial friend thinks it genuine.—Reject, too, entirely and at once, all commendation that is bestowed for qualities or for actions that conscience tells you have not the clear sanction of the word of God, how much soever they may be admired in the world. When this is tried in the crucible of truth and rectitude, it turns out *all dross*. None of it—no, not an atom, should be received and kept; *all* should be thrown away.—Finally, be jealous of those particular descriptions of commendation for which you are conscious of a special liking, and which are most apt to puff you up with undue self-elation, and to make you “think of yourself more highly than you ought to think.” There ought to be the most careful scrutiny here—a sensitive apprehension of receiving more than enough,—of allowing that to pass for gold which has the glitter and the colour of it merely, without the solid value. The process of refining should in this case be very cautiously pursued: just as a chemist, if anxious for the correct result of an experiment with the crucible, will be the more careful in making it, in proportion as he is conscious of any leaning towards a particular theory,—lest this should bias his mind and put him off his guard.

2. “A man is to his praise what the fining-pot is to silver, and the furnace is to gold,” because a man's conduct *actually does put to the test* the commendation bestowed upon him. That conduct is like “the fining-pot” and “the furnace” to it, in regard to the estimate formed of it *by others*. His behaviour detects whether it be or be not just and merited. Commendation naturally excites notice. All eyes are on the man who elicits applause, to ascertain if the applause be well-founded. In this way the commendation is *put to the test*;

and the man himself is the *tester*;—proving or disproving the justice of the character given him.

The *principle* here, you will at once perceive, is applicable to the character of *societies* as well as of individuals,—of families, of communities, of churches. Suppose a family has got high commendation bestowed upon it by one who professes to know it from long-continued intimacy, for mutual domestic affection, concord, sympathy, and practical kindness amongst its members,—anything of an opposite nature discovered among them, *tests the praise*, brings out the refuse, and operates as a deduction from the character, showing the eulogy not to be all genuine, but to have had in it so much at least of alloy—of baser material. So, when a church has been praised for purity, for love, for liberality, that church becomes its own “fining-pot.” It must act up to the character, if it would prove the commendation deserved. And so as to communities, when they have been commended for education, for morality, for religion. *Scotland* has had a high character for these,—much higher, it is to be feared, than now at least is merited. A stranger comes. He has great expectations. But he begins to find a much larger number than he anticipated uneducated, and without the morality and the religion for which the community had been so eulogized;—much of vice and crime; much of worldliness, and of the form of godliness without the power:—what he actually witnesses will operate upon the praise as “the fining-pot” does upon the silver. The *actual* character tries the *reported* character.

The twofold lesson, then, is—that we be self-jealous and humble in testing all commendation bestowed upon us to our face: and that we strive to maintain such a character as will prove the truth of what is bestowed upon us *to others*. They are both important lessons. Yet there is another still with which they ought to be associated. We should ever remember that there is a still higher test of commendation and of character than either our own judgment of ourselves or that of our fellowmen concerning us. Paul felt the necessity of bearing this in mind, when

he said respecting the opposite of commendation—the false insinuations and charges of his enemies—“I am conscious to myself of nothing; yet am I not hereby justified; but He that judgeth me is the Lord.” The same principle applies equally to *praise*. There is a tribunal even above conscience itself, which is liable, as Paul had before experienced, to various biassing and perverting influences;—so, that while amid the applause of our fellow-men, we may be “conscious to ourselves” of no flattery, of no undue partiality or extravagance in their praise,—and fancy it all no more than really belongs to us,—we do well to remember, that “*he that judgeth us is the Lord.*”—O what is to become of the man, who receives the praise of his fellows, and is encouraged by it to flatter himself that he stands well with God,—when, upon his character being subjected to “the fining pot” of the divine *law*, and to “the furnace” of the divine *omniscience*, it all comes out as dross, mere worthless dross—the praise found to be “of men but *not of God!*”

Verse 22. “Though thou shouldest bray a fool in a mortar among wheat with a pestle, yet will not his foolishness depart from him.”—To analyse this figure would be to render ludicrous what is most significant and impressive. It is a strong proverbial expression for what is superlatively difficult or impossible. You may separate the straw and the chaff by thrashing,—you may take off the husk by rubbing and trituration,—you may turn the grain to meal or flour by grinding,—but to drive folly from the human heart, is *more than man can do*.

By the fool here might with truth be understood the weak and senseless man,—of little mind, and at the same time (as not seldom happens), of no little self-conceit; who is ever obstinate and headstrong,—tenacious of his own opinions and his own ways; ever saying and doing absurd and preposterous things, and still stoutly and with mulish stubbornness maintaining their propriety, to the annoyance and vexation of all about him or connected with him; and whom no instructions, no expostulations, no reproofs, and no fatal consequences of his errors, how much soever experienced by

both himself and others, will mend. His folly is engrained; and the very next thing he does will be as absurd and preposterous as before. But here, as in most other places in this book, the "fool" is the *unprincipled* man. And the sentiment is, that the native corruption of the human heart, especially when it has acquired the additional force of habit, is such that *no mere means whatever*, applied with even the largest amount of persevering diligence, will effectually overcome and remove it. And though means of *all* descriptions may be included, those most naturally suggested by the figure are *correction* and *suffering*. The meaning will then be,—that no parental admonitions and chastisements,—no pains and penalties of human infliction,—no divine judgments,—will radically and permanently *change the heart*. Its corruption is not like a husk, which envelops the grain, and does not enter into its substance, and which an external application of a little skilful force will remove. The corruption is *in* the heart itself—penetrates and pervades its entire substance, even to the very core, and vitiates all that proceeds from it.

Mistake not. There is no assertion made at variance with the universally admitted tendency of means, and the duty and necessity of using them. But the power of "the old man" is too strong for them, and successfully resists them all. Temporary impressions may be made,—such as appear promising; and external and partial reformations may manifest themselves. Thus it was with Herod under the faithful ministry of the Baptist. He "feared John, because he was a just man and holy; and when he heard him he did many things, and heard him gladly." Yet he set at nought and insulted Him of whom John testified—"He that cometh after me is mightier than I; the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose;" and he lived and died in impenitence and wickedness. Where the impression and the reformation are the effects of the operation of *means alone*, working on the natural principles of reason and conscience, they will, in like manner, prove superficial and evanescent:—

“Can aught beneath a power divine  
 The stubborn will subdue?  
 ’Tis thine, Eternal Spirit, thine  
 To form the heart anew.”

The sentiment here so strongly expressed, and in such harmony with other statements of Scripture, should be seriously weighed by those who entertain the idea that the punishments of a future world are to operate *correctively*, and to work an ultimate reformation upon the offenders who, having died impenitent, are their unhappy subjects. *Suffering* may and must produce *regret*—bitter, agonizing regret: and this, indeed, is an ingredient in the suffering,—the agony of regret, when known and felt to be too late and to be of no avail. But suffering can never subdue enmity,—can never generate love. *Regret* is not *repentance*. It cannot turn the heart to God. It will rather turn it against Him, embittering the virulence of its hatred and its tormenting but impotent vindictiveness.

The Spirit of God, it is true, can and does make use of judicial inflictions in this life, amongst the means of awakening, convicting, and converting sinners. But *of themselves* they will never work the change. It is not till God himself touches the heart that Ephraim is heard thus to bemoan himself—“Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the Lord my God. Surely after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh: I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth,” Jer. xxxi. 18, 19. And beyond the present world, the divine influence by which true penitence is produced, and the heart changed from enmity to love, *does not extend*. Hell will make no penitents—no converts. “He that is unjust shall be unjust still; and he that is filthy shall be filthy still.”

The verses which follow to the close of the chapter relate evidently to *one* subject. There are two different views taken of them.

1. By some the verses have been considered as the wise man's recommendation of the simplicity, the comforts, the general enjoyment and happiness of a *country life*,—a life of *rural retirement*, and *labour*, and *competency*; and as designed for the purpose of repressing, in the bosom of the man of privacy and rustic seclusion, the rising envy of the wealth and the honours of a city life,—or a life of greater *eclat* and publicity:—the natural effect of such envy being indolence and inaction, arising from dissatisfaction with the occupations of his own sphere.

According to this interpretation, the “riches which are not for ever,” and “the crown”—or honours of this world—that “endure not to all generations,” must be understood of the riches and the honours by which envious desires have been engendered. These riches and honours are proverbially insecure.\* Royal dignity itself may soon pass from one to another. Even “*the crown*” sits not firm upon any brow. Instead, therefore, of repining in envious dissatisfaction—apply thyself, says the wise man, assiduously and cheerfully, to thy rural occupations. “Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks, and look well to thy herds.”

The further motive to this course is—the personal and social comfort which such a life was fitted to yield. Here is a picturesque exhibition, as such commentators understand the passage, of the attractions of a rural life.

i. We have, in the first place, the cheerful loveliness of nature, rising before the eye, in all its freshness, luxuriance, and beauty: “The hay appeareth, and the tender grass showeth itself, and herbs of the mountains are gathered.” There is something in the scene itself that is interesting and attractive to a mind of which the natural tastes have not been perverted, independently of all idea of profit and personal advantage. How charming is the green and glittering freshness of a dewy summer morning,—when every blade of grass is decked with diamonds, sparkling in the light of the rising sun,—when the mower plies his task, and the

\* Chap. xxiii. 5.



fragrance of the new-mown hay scents the air; and the corn-fields wave in promise of the coming autumn, and the hills are clothed with their appropriate trees, and shrubs and herbage! How preferable such a scene to the dingy smoke and manifold pollutions of the crowded city! Custom and habit, it is true, and diverse associations of ideas, both form and change men's tastes. But surely nature is on the side of the country:—

“God made the country, and man made the town.”

ii. We have here too before us, in association although not in expression, the simplicity and comparative harmless innocence of rural life. I speak only comparatively:—and comparatively, it must, I think, be admitted. Great towns necessarily become scenes of concentrated profligacy, of mental contamination and progress in vice. Many a youth that comes from the country, with all the simplicity and unsuspectingness of rural habits, is ruined by this fatal contagion, for which his experience has not prepared him, when he enters on a town life. As evil is much more readily and effectually learned than good, wherever there is the crowding and intermixture of a dense population, there will be the rapid spread of its infection,—there will be the accumulation of immorality. We must, however, be on our guard against sentimentalism and romance. Some appear almost to forget that the corruption of our nature extends to the country at all. But the country alas!—and that even in its most retired seclusiveness, has its irreligion and ungodliness, its vices, its sins and crimes, as well as the city;—the glories and the beauties of nature too frequently presenting a mournful contrast to the moral and spiritual desolation and deformity prevalent among the inhabitants who live in the midst of them. God makes himself known in all around; yet even in the midst of all the manifestations of Him that are fitted to elevate the soul to the adoration of His perfections, He is by multitudes forgotten and disregarded. But we speak now of what the country is in its native tendencies, not of what man is in his compliance with or resistance of those tendencies.

iii. We have next the profit and comfort which are the fruit of rural occupations, when attended to with diligent and patient industry: "The lambs are for thy clothing, and the goats are the price of the field. And thou shalt have goats' milk enough for thy food, for the food of thy household, and for the maintenance of thy maidens." The fleece of the lambs, when they come to maturity, furnishes the means of comfortable clothing and protection from the cold:—the goats assist in producing payment for the rent of the land,—or in yielding interest and profit upon "*the price*" of it, and the outlay upon it;—and the family is maintained and served, with decency and comfort, in the homely and simple, but wholesome and happy style of rural economy:—not the less happy for being free of the luxury which advancing prosperity and the emulation of refinement and show arising from it, ever introduce into great towns and cities.—The farmer, then,—even with all his cares and solitudes, and all his peculiar difficulties and trials, need not envy the city merchant, even in his highest prosperity and honour.—

2. It is quite as likely, if not more so, that Solomon here, under *one* description of earthly property,—intends to include *all*,—and while inculcating duty, to recommend mindfulness of the uncertainty of the possessions of this world in general, and the moderation of desire and pursuit of them which that should produce. In this view, we have—

i. The duty of industry and diligent application to our temporal affairs: "Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks, and look well to thy herds." The duty is very frequently enjoined in this Book, and throughout the Bible. Neither in rural nor in city occupations, are men to expect success without the prudent and active employment of *means*. And the duty is enjoined on the people of God as well as others. Nowhere does He teach them to beware of having any thing more to do with secular business,—to be entirely absorbed in their spiritual concerns, and leave the world to shift as it may—the men of the world to mind the world's affairs. No. It is theirs to set an example of industry with moderation, of active application without undue

solicitude, and without undue regret in case the industry should fail of success; of the compatibility of “diligence” in worldly matters with true spirituality of mind,—of doing earthly work with having “the heart in heaven,”—of being “not slothful in business,” whilst “fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.” Then we have—

ii. The precariousness and transitory character of all that pertains to time and the world, is adduced as a *motive* to the diligence enjoined. “For riches are not for ever: and doth the crown endure to every generation?” The riches and honours of this world are not acquired in *perpetuity*,—no, not even with the security of a day. It is necessary to look well after them, to give diligence to *keep* as well as to get, inasmuch as, even with all attention and care, “riches make themselves wings and fly away.” *With* it they *may*; and *without* it they *must*. And the time being not only uncertain, but short at the longest, it is the dictate of prudence,—*Use them while you can*. Take the moderate and the comfortable enjoyment of them, so long as God may be pleased to continue your possession of them. It is a pleasing view of the kindness of Him whose “tender mercies are over all his works,” to be assured, that what He bestows *it is his design that we enjoy*:—that we “*use* without abusing,”—that we take the benefit, and apply it for the comfort of ourselves and families, in the first instance, with decency and respectability, but without extravagance and waste. He does not give, and with the gift issue an order not to use it. There is nothing to be found in the Bible of that kind of self-denial which consists in the penance of self inflicted privation,—in the practice of voluntary mortification and abandonment of all the innocent enjoyments of life. If God gives “flocks and herds”—they are for “food and for clothing,” and for the comfortable maintenance of the household establishment:—“If any man provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.” But then—

iii. Whenever we make admissions of this kind, they are in danger of being perverted. When we tell men of God’s

kind indulgences,—they are ever prone to take advantage of them, and to forget the restrictions under which those indulgences are placed. The different parts of the divine word are to be viewed in their connexion. A passage like this must not be taken by itself, and the inference drawn from it that while we are expending what God gives on the food and clothing and comfort and enjoyment of our families, we are doing *what* God requires and *all* that God requires. We should then be forgetting *other* requirements not less obligatory than these, and showing in the latitude with which we interpret what is most to our mind, the amount there is remaining in us of *personal* and *domestic selfishness*. On the contrary, we ought to be most on our guard on the side of self—most on our guard where we are most in danger of erring. We should be jealous of ourselves; and, aware of the deceitfulness of our hearts, to keep our ear the more open, and our heart the more open, and our purse the more open, to the claims of the poor, and to the claims of God and of a perishing world, in proportion as self and family put in their plea with earnestness.

Finally, while we are all abundantly sensible of the value, and eager for the acquisition, of the comforts and the wealth of the present world, O let us remember and feel the infinitely superior value of the “treasure in the heaven that faileth not.” On *this*, above all, let our hearts be set,—as the gift of God, “without money and without price,”—which “cannot be gotten for gold, neither can silver be weighed for the price thereof.” “Where our treasure is, there let our hearts be also.”

## LECTURE LXXXVI.

—◆—  
PROV. XXVIII. 1—13.

“The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion. For the transgression of a land many are the princes thereof: but by a man of understanding and knowledge the state thereof shall be prolonged. A poor man that oppresseth the poor is like a sweeping rain, which leaveth no food. They that forsake the law praise the wicked: but such as keep the law contend with them. Evil men understand not judgment: but they that seek the Lord understand all things. Better is the poor that walketh in his uprightness, than he that is perverse in his ways, though he be rich. Whoso keepeth the law is a wise son: but he that is a companion of riotous men shameth his father. He that by usury and unjust gain increaseth his substance, he shall gather it for him that will pity the poor. He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination. Whoso causeth the righteous to go astray in an evil way, he shall fall himself into his own pit: but the upright shall have good things in possession. The rich man is wise in his own conceit; but the poor that hath understanding searcheth him out. When righteous men do rejoice, there is great glory: but when the wicked rise, a man is hidden. He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.”

THE sentiment in the first of these verses is one which, in all ages and all countries, has been more or less proverbial. It is—*the timidity of conscious guilt*. We can trace it to an early origin,—even to the immediate effect of the first sin on the mind of the first man. Then it was that “the voice of the Lord God,” which before possessed all the sweetest melody and most delightful and irresistible attraction, filled Adam with alarm, driving him to a hiding-place; instead of drawing him to the divine presence. And ever since—

“’Tis conscience has made cowards of us all.”

Yet—would that there were now *more* of this timidity in regard to God! The thoughtless inconsideration of men, respecting their guilt in His sight,—and the hazard of His wrath thence arising, is utterly confounding. And what an amount of *hardihood* often springs from this! Timidity and alarm are, alas! much more frequent, and much more operative, in regard to detection and punishment *by men*:—“The murderer, rising with the light, killeth the poor and needy, and in the night is as a thief. The eye also of the adulterer waiteth for the twilight, saying, No eye shall see me; and disguiseth his face. In the dark they dig through houses, which they had marked for themselves in the daytime: they know not the light. For the morning is to them even as the shadow of death: if one know them, they are in the terrors of the shadow of death,” Job xxiv. 14—17. How vivid and powerful this description! And yet all the while, another eye—the eye of God—is upon them; for “there is no darkness nor shadow of death where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves.” “The sound of a shaking leaf” will frighten and scare them; yet are they unmoved and undismayed amid “the terrors of the Almighty.”

But it is not always thus. Whilst the fear of man makes the wicked fancy every noise the sound of the foot of vengeance behind him, and “flee when there is no one” there—no witness, no pursuer, even in regard to God they cannot always hold out. When the Bible, or the preacher from the Bible, “reasons of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come,” the conscience is awakened; the spirit trembles; the poor convicted sinner becomes *all nerve*; every thing startles him; he is timidity itself; his name “Magor-missabil,” *fear round about*,—haunted by suspicion of every person and of every thing. Hell opens before him. And this is no mere imagination; but he trembles as if he were already at the very entrance, and hosts of devils behind him, urging him forward to perdition.

On the contrary—“*the righteous are bold as a lion.*” Conscience innocent inspires *confidence*, just as conscience guilty engenders *fear*. This was felt fully in paradise. There was

no fear there. It is true of the people of God *now*, when they keep His way and put their trust in Him. Then they can exultingly exclaim—"God is for us; who can be against us?" But it is then only that all fear vanishes. When there is an inward consciousness that we have not God on our side, all is shrinking apprehensiveness; we tremble at every shadow. Our eye, *then*, instead of being lifted up in confidence to Him, is cast down in timid shame, and our spirit quails and sinks and trembles.

In the language of the *second* verse there is necessarily involved the supposition of an overruling Providence;—and, since nations cannot be dealt with *as such* in the *future* world, the further assumption that they are dealt with to a certain extent, judicially and retributively, in *this*. These principles were, in a special manner, acted upon in the case of the Jewish people. They were under a peculiar dispensation of their own,—a *theocracy*, as it has been appropriately called,—a government of immediate and often miraculous interposition. Yet still, in that history, so far as *retribution* was concerned,—or the visiting with prosperity or adversity, success or calamity, according as good or evil, obedience or wickedness prevailed,—*their* history, as it appears in connexion with that of the surrounding nations, may be regarded truly and with advantage, as a specimen of the principles on which God's general administration over the kingdoms of the world is conducted all along.

Of the ways in which He can make nations feel his displeasure for their crimes, *here is one*:—"For the transgression of a land many are the princes thereof."

1. This may be interpreted of the case of *rival princes*;—when there are a number of them,—branches, it may be, of the same lineage, or members of old and new dynasties, with their discordant claims and their separate adherents. By these the country is divided, split into factions, embroiled in party contentions and civil wars, filled from end to end with mutual jealousies, suspicions, and fears;—ultimately covering it with desolation, and, by dividing it against itself, threatening and endangering its existence.

2. It may be understood of a *rapid succession of princes*. This includes frequent and sudden changes of men and measures; by which means nothing has time to mature and to get a settled establishment. There is incessant confliction, and counteraction, and revolution,—every fresh ruler undoing and reversing the plans and purposes of his predecessor,—traitor after traitor, usurper after usurper, rising, and conspiring, and cutting off the one before him, and thus keeping the land in incessant convulsion and change.—If you wish to have before you such a contrast as may illustrate Solomon's position,—read the history in the Old Testament of the revolted tribes under Jeroboam, and that of Judah under the long administration of David.\*

It is added, as an antithesis to the first part of the verse, "*But by a man of understanding and knowledge the state thereof shall be prolonged.*"

The first remark which presents itself here is—that the contrast in the verse is not between the long reign of one and the contentions and short successive reigns of many, *irrespective of character*. It is obvious that the prolongation of the reign of a foolish and unprincipled monarch might be as really a scourge to a nation as either rivalry or rapid succession. The prolongation of such a reign might be to a land the heaviest of curses, and the termination of it the greatest of blessings. But when the reigning prince is a "man of understanding and wisdom,"—a man of sound moral and sound political principles, and a man of intelligence and vigour to put those principles forth in beneficial operation, the prolongation of it is a blessing indeed. In that case the prolongation of personal life is the prolongation of national prosperity.

"Let the children of Zion be joyful in *their King*." The kingdom to which they belong has *one King*; and a king whose reign is permanent as well as unparticipated. There are no *rival powers* there. If the princes of this world, in the plenitude of their presumption, take upon them to in-

\* See especially 1 Kings xv.; and 2 Kings xv.



trude themselves within the precincts of His sole jurisdiction, and to intermeddle with what does not belong to them, the subjects of the King of Zion must stand by His prerogative, resist the encroachment, and, at all risks as to this world, refuse obedience. In the spiritual kingdom of which they are subjects, Christ is the only Head; and His word the only authoritative Rule.

And there is *no succession* here. He reigns over the house of Jacob for ever; “and of his kingdom there is no end.” Blessed be God for this! The sceptre of our King can never, even to the end, be wrested out of his hands; and He *never dies*. He must reign, till all his people are saved with an everlasting salvation, and all his enemies are put under his feet.

Verse 3. “A poor man that oppresseth the poor is like a sweeping rain, which leaveth no food.” The oppression of the poor is bad in all. In this verse, we have one description especially of the evil. There are aggravations of it on the part of the rich; and there are aggravations of it on the part of the poor. When done by the rich, it is a palpable and flagrant perversion of the purposes of providence. It is the manifest intention of God in the constitution of human society,—in the variety in it of rank and station, of wealth and want, that the rich should be the guardians of the poor, that they should care for them, and supply their need. When it is otherwise,—when this duty is neglected,—they become like clouds full of rain, and giving promise of refreshing showers to bless and fructify the parched wastes, which burst in destructive lightning and tempest. There can be no greater or guiltier abuse of their superiority,—of their riches and their influence.

But the case before us is that of *the poor oppressing the poor*;—not that of a man who *was* poor, but has risen, and by whom, from the recollection of his own sufferings and his own feelings under them, sympathy should be cherished and manifested,—but that of the man who is himself *actually needy*, only having acquired by his situation a certain power over others. Such cases as the following may be

exemplifications of it. There are *extravagant spendthrifts*, who have run themselves out; who have reduced themselves to straits; who are in debt; but who have got themselves into some situation of authority; and whose object, in the exercise of their power, is to recruit their broken and exhausted fortunes. Woe to all that are under them! All their powers of exaction are strained to the uttermost. Wherever there is aught seen or suspected which it is in the power of pressure to squeeze out, that pressure is applied with the force of a vice.—There are *indigent governors*,—in personal poverty and with empty exchequers;—and the extortion of such characters as well as of the former, is the worst of any—all-grasping and rapacious. It is, as here represented, like an inundation, sweeping all before it. The *poor* oppressor descends to such pitiful exactions as the rich oppressor would think beneath him,—not leaving behind a single ear to glean,—a single berry in the uttermost bough. And what, to a province, must be a succession of indigent rulers, each of them eager to make the most for himself and his family of his temporary incumbency?—We might descend lower. The principle of the verse applies to every case down to the needy overseer of workmen, whose living depends on the amount of the proceeds of their labour. There is nothing, in the form of despicable and severe oppression, to which such men, if they are not men of principle, will not stoop to accomplish their selfish ends.

In the preceding chapter, (v. 17) we have a proverb respecting the animating influence of a man's countenance or favour on the activity of his friend. But alas! there is a countenancing of others in *evil* as well as in *good*:—verse 4. "*They that forsake the law praise the wicked.*" The two characters are the same:—the wicked praise the wicked. Wicked men like to be kept in countenance. They encourage and sharpen each other in evil. And from the same cause arises their hatred of the good. They cannot bear their example. It puts them to shame. It is ever condemning them; ever conveying to them a practical reproof, and stirring up conscience when it would rather slumber in peace. The all-per-

fect Son of God in our nature expresses what He saw and experienced of this principle when He sojourned amongst men:—"The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil." And He forewarns his followers to expect the same experience in proportion as they resembled Him in character and in separation from the world:—"If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you."

It is obvious that from the very same source arises their *praise of one another* here mentioned by Solomon. This is very far from meaning that *in conscience they approve* of what they praise. It is only that *in heart they like it*. And *liking* the evil, they like encouragement and countenance in it. This is, in a special manner, the case with regard to the particular sins in which they are respectively fond of indulging. They *do* love so well to have some one who makes light of these; suggests plausible palliations of them; and joins them in their perpetration. Hence it is that men are so prone to the applause of what may be called *feats* of evil, of extraordinary displays of dexterity and cleverness, or of uncommon courage and determined boldness in the commission of it. They like the association. They cover up the wickedness under their admiration of the cleverness and the courage:—just as men so often overlook the immorality of a work of genius, for the sake of the genius with which it is invested; and, instead of visiting it on that very account, with the severer condemnation, seem as if they would fall in love with the evil for the sake of its dress.

There is another principle that sometimes leads to the praise of the wicked—the principle of *self-interest*. When a wicked man has it in his power to do us a service, we are tempted to ingratiate ourselves into his favour by covering over his vices, and heaping on him hypocritical commendation. Look at the case of Herod's fulsome, parasitical,

and selfish flatterers.\* Look again at Tertullus—the orator hired by the Jews to criminate Paul.† What a contrast between his style and the conduct of the Apostle, when he had the most favourable opportunity of gaining the good graces of his judge! “Seeing,” said the fawning orator, “that by thee we enjoy great quietness, and that very worthy deeds are done to this nation by thy providence, we accept it always, and in all places, most noble Felix.” “Paul,” with intrepid soul, “reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come,” till “Felix trembled.” Of the same spirit of faithful reprehension of wickedness, many instances might be gathered from the history of the prophets and apostles: and we have the most striking of all in the person of Jesus himself. In this, as in every other excellence, he “left us an example that we should follow his steps.” Whatever be the rank or circumstances of the parties, and how much soever our own interests may be at stake, we must never smile when we ought to frown; never maintain a timid silence, when we ought to speak; never purchase for ourselves exemption from any evil, or the attainment of any benefit by the slightest accommodation, or compliance, or tampering with iniquity. Every fair opportunity should be embraced of kind expostulation and reproof. “*Contending with them,*” implies not angry violence, but the zeal at once of piety and of benevolence. What would have become of the Jews, after the restoration from Babylon, but for the firm and resolute *contentions* of Nehemiah?—And what would have become of the Reformation, but for the indomitable courage and unbending severity of Luther and of Knox?—*They* were the men who, instead of “praising the wicked,” “contended with them,”—and wrestled hard to overcome all the monstrous abuses and abominations, which, under the name and sanction of religion, were practised with greediness.

In the following verse we are reminded afresh of the tendency of evil in the disposition and character to obscure the

\* See Acts xii. 20—23.

† Acts xxiv. 2—4.

mental vision, and prevent the clear apprehension of spiritual and divine truth. The principles and convictions of “*evil men*” become more and more perverted, and their moral sensibilities more and more blunted and deadened, by the power of habit. Thus they “*understand not judgment.*” Their “*minds are blinded,*”—their intellect darkened and besotted. They lose their discernment between right and wrong. Their conscience becomes less and less discriminative and impassible. They *cannot*—that is, in effect, they *will not* see, what a good and upright man discerns with an almost intuitive certainty. On the contrary, “*They that seek the Lord*”—they who, under the influence of a spirit of humble self-diffidence, look out of themselves to God; trust in Him for divine illumination, and do His will to the full extent of their discovery and knowledge of it—*they* are enlightened from above. They “*understand all things.*” All things are plain to them; both the truths and precepts of God,—what they are to *believe* and what they are to *do*.\*

Verse 6. “Better is the poor that walketh in his uprightness, than he that is perverse in his ways, though he be rich.”† The sentiment may be understood of the “*poor man*” who remains poor because he will not have recourse to any improper means for bettering his condition, and to the “*rich man*” who by such means has made his wealth. Who will hesitate in pronouncing, in such a case, the one better than the other—the man who forfeits wealth for principle, or the man who sacrifices principle for wealth?—the man who barter his conscience for the world, or the man who, in comparison with a good conscience, holds the world as less than nothing and vanity?—But the sentiment may be taken generally, and was probably so meant by Solomon, as referring to the *poor good man* and the *rich ungodly man*. The former is “*better*” than the latter, in every view. He is *better*, in real *excellence and estimableness of character*. He is *better* in regard to his *influence in society*. He is better, in re-

\* Psal. xxv. 9: 1 Cor. ii. 14—16.

† Comp. chap. xvi. 8; xix. 1, 22.

gard to *present happiness* and to *true respectability and honour*. He is better, infinitely better, in regard to *future prospects*.

Verse 7. "Whoso keepeth the law is a wise son: but he that is a companion of riotous men shameth his father"—"*The law*" here, I need hardly say, is—not the law of the land—though that too it is duty to keep, as far as it is in harmony with the will of the supreme Legislator:—it is *the law of God*. The sentiment is one of those which pervade this Book, again and again recurring under different forms. "He who *keepeth the law*," is the same character with him that *fears God*; the one being the practical counterpart of the other; the fear of God being the keeping of the law in principle, and the keeping of the law the fear of God in practice. And as this fear of God *is wisdom*, the possessor of it is the "wise son."

"*He who is a companion of riotous men*," is on the margin—"he that *feedeth gluttons*;" feasting, sumptuously and jovially, the choice spirits—the *bons vivans* whom he has made his companions; who are never in their element but when carousing, drowning care in festivity; whose sovereign maxim is, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die!" He who chooses such associates, chooses his own disgrace and ruin: nor is this all the evil—"he *shameth his father*."\*

Verse 8. "He that by usury and unjust gain increaseth his substance, he shall gather it for him that will pity the poor."—This verse may be fitly compared and taken in connexion with verse sixth. "*Usury*" is here to be understood of every description of oppressive, unrighteous, and rigorous exaction. The providence of a just and merciful God is evidently here referred to. That providence transfers wealth from the hand of grasping and griping selfishness to that of humanity and generous kindness—to that of the man who "*pities the poor*." Men may not mark the divine hand in occurrences of this kind; and it is always a delicate matter for us—one to which we are hardly equal—to interpret providence *judicially*. But there are cases at times, in which

\* Compare chap. i. 10; iv. 14, 15; xxiii. 20--25.

the transference is so striking, that it would be impiety not to see and to own God in it. "Whoso is wise, and will observe these things,—even he shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord."

The sentiment of the *ninth* verse has more than once occurred, but the pointedly antithetical form in which it is there stated, deserves special notice. It is this:—that *if a man turn away his ear from God, God will turn away His ear from him.*—The prayer of the sinner, who has in time past "turned away his ear," but who is now coming back to God, in faith and penitence, with the broken and contrite heart which He never despises,—that sinner God *will* hear,—ay, will delight to hear. How long soever he may have turned away his ear from both the law and the gospel,—God will "receive him graciously, and love him freely." His whole word gives the chief of sinners the assurance of this. When the prodigal son,—who had "turned away his ear from the law" both of his father and of his God,—came back with the confession, "I have sinned before heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son,"—was his father's ear *then* turned away from him? Was not his ear all interest, and his eye all mercy, and his heart all tenderness, and his house and table all welcome, and all bountifulness, to the youth who was "dead and alive again, who was lost and found?" Yes. It is to the sinner who *goes on* in his rebellion that the words before us refer. *That* sinner God will *not* hear.

The *tenth* verse presents just another operation of the same principle as that in verse *fourth*. We saw on that verse, that the same state of mind which produces the praise of the wicked produces the hatred of the righteous:—and here is one of the ways in which the hatred discovers itself—"causing the righteous to go astray in an evil way,"—enticing him *to sin*,—tempting to an act or to a course of *evil*. Whether this be done from hatred, assuming the form of spiteful envy, and dislike of the goodness which condemns the conduct of the tempter; or from the wish to have the example of such a man to plead, whether seriously or in

jest, in behalf of the sin in which he himself delights; or in order to have an occasion for the derision of true godliness,—of making it, in the person of the fallen professor, the theme of scoffing and sarcastic merriment—how wicked, —how deeply criminal, the man who does it! “*He shall fall himself into his own pit:*” —the effect of his treacherous and profane conduct shall be evil to himself,—evil from a just and holy God. That God will preserve the righteous from yielding to the temptation, or will “restore his soul, and make him to walk again in the paths of righteousness,” —while on the head of the tempter he will bring down heavy vengeance—so that the pit which he digged for the godly shall prove his own destruction.—“But the upright shall have good things in possession:” literally, “*shall inherit good.*” They shall have from God all that is truly good for them of this world’s possessions and enjoyments,—all that infinite wisdom sees to be really for their benefit. And they shall receive and possess for ever all the blessings in the promises of the covenant of grace,—“all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ,”—and “all the fulness of God” in the world to come.

Verse 11. “The rich man is wise in his own conceit; but the poor that hath understanding searcheth him out.”—There are many rich men who are humble and self-diffident, and many poor men who have a very high conceit of themselves. But, in the natural course of things, the possession of wealth gives weight, influence, and importance. The word of the rich man comes to have consequence attached to it. This arises greatly from the selfishness of our nature,—from the knowledge of what riches enable a man to do for such as are in favour with the owner. “The rich hath many friends.” And the power he acquires arises, at the same time, from his having so great a stake in the community. From the influence of the self-interest just referred to, he gets accustomed to being flattered, and honoured, and having everything his own way. This all tends to render him dictatorial; to make him fancy his word law. Not being disposed to think that others flatter his judgment for the sake of



his purse, he comes to think highly of that which is so flattered and yielded to. And he utters his mind oracularly in the spirit of one whom no man will venture to gainsay. Often and strongly is the tendency manifested in those who have risen to the possession of wealth from a low condition. The effect of riches in puffing up with self-conceit,—especially if the rise has been sudden, and there is no great firmness and natural vigour of mind to bear it,—is often ludicrously apparent in such cases. The man becomes at once purse-proud and overweeningly vain; and puts the weight of his purse into every word he utters.

*“But the poor that hath understanding searcheth him out.”* Many a man who is not in providence blessed with riches, is blessed with what is higher and better,—a large amount of sagacity and shrewdness and sound judgment and penetration;—and still more, with genuine principle. The phrase, *“searcheth him out”* may be variously understood. He discerns his true character. He sees that wisdom and wealth do not always go together; that a full purse is quite compatible with an empty head. He sees too that a man’s wisdom is not to be estimated by his opinion of himself. He sees shallowness where the man himself fancies depth, and folly in what elates him with a vain consciousness of his own wisdom. He sees abundant reason for not making the rich man his oracle, or setting him up as his idol, or making his example the pattern for his imitation, merely for the number of his acres, or for the gold and silver in his coffers. He sees how prone men in general are to allow weight to counsel in proportion to the wealth of the counsellor. But the *“understanding”* which God has given him shows him the absurdity of this. He *“searches out”* the fallacy, and detects and exposes the imprudence and folly of sentiments and proposals, that are propounded and recommended by the wealthiest of the wealthy. And still further, taking *“understanding”* in its higher sense, as it is used in this Book, as including a mind divinely enlightened and under the influence of the fear of God and all the principles of true religion:—the poor man who has this, sees and knows

that “a little with the fear of the Lord is better than the riches of many wicked;”—that “a good understanding have all they who do his commandments;”—that no folly can be more palpable and flagrant than the folly of “trusting in uncertain riches,”—“setting the eyes upon that which is not,” and neglecting provision for the soul and for eternity,—forfeiting the “unsearchable riches” provided by the mercy of God for sinners,—all the blessings, unspeakably precious, summed up in “life everlasting;”—spurning away the counsel that would put these in possession;—greedily coveting the treasures of the world that perish in the using, and rejecting the divine offer of the treasures of immortality. The poor man who hath understanding—I can hardly say “*searches out*” the folly of this,—he discerns it by a kind of spiritual intuition. And, while he pities, he is free from every emotion of envy.

Verse 12. “When righteous men do rejoice, there is great glory: but when the wicked rise, a man is hidden.”—“*Rejoicing*” evidently means prospering,—being in favour,—advanced to honour and influence and rule. It corresponds, in the antithesis, with the word “*rise*,”—which is used for elevation to places of power.\*—When the ruler is himself a man of principle, and prefers men of like principle to all the offices of authority under him,—chooses them for his counsellors, and sets them around his throne—this is indicative of *good times*, and is to a community a ground of exultation. Then the good come forward; they show themselves; they exert their salutary influence; they promote the country’s welfare. They are not afraid. They are in favour with the prince, and find favour with the people. The kingdom flourishes. “*There is great glory.*”

“But when the wicked rise, *a man is hidden.*”—The words have been variously understood. The Vulgate has it—“When the ungodly reign, it is the ruin of men.” But our own and the French rendering seem to give the true sense. The latter is—“every one disguises or conceals himself.” It is, to the good—to those whose services would prove for the

\* See chap. xi. 10

real benefit of the country, the reign of *fear*. They are discouraged, intimidated, and obliged, for life and safety, to keep out of the way. Such a state of things is sadly ominous of all that is evil. There have been such seasons in our own land;—seasons, when the “excellent of the earth,”—God’s own people, have been constrained to “run into corners to hide themselves;” when unrighteousness and intolerance have “hunted them like partridges on the mountains,” and have driven them into the “dens and caves of the earth.” Happily we live in other times; when, whatever we may say of the *piety* of our rulers, both religious liberties and civil rights are better understood and more fully and practically recognized:—when there is perfect freedom and full scope for whatever efforts the good may be disposed to put forth; and when we may be said to “sit under our vines and fig-trees, no one making us afraid.” We have exemplifications of both parts of the verse in the history of Israel and Judah. There was “glorying” among all the truly good in Israel when David assembled them to bring up to its place the ark of the covenant; when Solomon dedicated the temple; when Hezekiah restored the passover; when Jehoshaphat dispersed the Levites through all the cities to teach the law and the fear of the Lord; and when young Josiah wept and humbled himself at the contents of the long-neglected and hidden book of God’s covenant. So was it in the days of Mordecai, when deliverance came through him to his people, and they had “light and joy, and gladness and honour,” and “a good day.” There was, on the contrary, fear and “hiding,” when, in Saul’s time, David was hunted to death; when in Ahab’s, Elijah—even the intrepid Elijah—fled for his life, and when good Obadiah, at the risk of his own head, hid fifty of the Lord’s prophets in a cave and fed them with bread and water;—and when Micaiah, “faithful among the faithless,” had to be sought and sent for, and for the fidelity of his words, was ordered to prison, while the hundreds of the prophets of Baal were in favour and triumphed. What hiding and fear there were when the wicked Haman “rose”—and what exultation when he fell and the righteous came in his room!

Verse 13. "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." The saying may be taken in reference to *men*, and in reference to *God*. To "*cover*" sin—is to conceal, to deny, to justify, to palliate. This is not the way to forgiveness *with men*. High-minded pride, and obstinate impenitence, and persisting in trespass and self-vindication, will never obtain mercy;—and *ought not*. Humble confession is becoming, and is duty:—for the supposition is, that sin has actually been committed. It behoves that the offender should be brought to a right spirit,—that he should confess, with contrition, his fault. The rule laid down by our Lord for His disciples is:—"If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him.—And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him," Luke xvii. 3, 4. The words can hardly have reference to the repetition of the *very same offence*:—for in the verse before us, *forsaking* is added to confessing as required in order to mercy. Now on the supposition of the indefinite repetition of the same offence, there is no forsaking; nor is there, therefore, the necessary evidence of sincerity in the "*I repent*." The lesson is obviously that we should *never be weary of forgiving*. To the utmost extent to which there remains the possibility of *sincerity*, there should still be the readiness to extend mercy. How sad were it for us, were God to *weary of pardoning*. And yet with Him there must, in order to pardon, be *sincerity in the confession*. The sinner who "covers his sins" by hypocrisy, or, while he confesses, continues to practise the evil—must remain in condemnation. He is not a subject of mercy. He is *unpardoned*. He has the witness of this in himself.—The "confessing" implies of course a right view, and a right impression, of the sin confessed, and the sincere exercise of a "broken and contrite heart." It implies, according to the gospel, the exercise of faith in the revealed ground of mercy, or way of divine forgiveness. And it implies the manifestation of sincerity in the *forsaking* of the sin. Without

this, all is sheer hypocrisy, and can never be pleasing to that God who “desireth truth in the inward parts.”

One remark more. It is not *for our confessing* that we “find mercy.” Neither is it *for our faith* from which the confession arises. The faith and the confession are necessary to our finding mercy; but the ground on which mercy is obtained is the propitiatory sacrifice of the “Mediator between God and men.”\*—The Bible is full of the gracious and interesting lesson of this verse. Cain, the first murderer, could not have mercy, because he neither confessed his sin with penitence, nor trusted in the propitiation:—but to the question of Jehovah, “Where is Abel thy brother?” replied with sullen falsehood, “I know not; am I my brother’s keeper?” Mark the terms prescribed by Jehovah to his ancient people, in order to their “finding mercy:” they are in full harmony with the verse before us—“If their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they accept of the punishment of their iniquity; then will I remember my covenant with Jacob, and also my covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham will I remember,” Lev. xxvi. 41, 42. And mark how David joins confession with forgiveness—“I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin,” Psal. xxxii. 5. Beautifully and most encouragingly is the same thing represented in the parable of the prodigal son—the *confession of the son, and the ready forgiveness of the father*. Let the sinner but say in sincerity—“I have sinned, and am no more worthy,” and the divine arms are open to receive him.

\* Comp. 1 John i. 6, 10.

## LECTURE LXXXVII.

—◆—  
PROV. XXVIII. 14—28.

“Happy is the man that feareth alway: but he that hardeneth his heart shall fall into mischief. As a roaring lion, and a ranging bear; so is a wicked ruler over the poor people. The prince that wanteth understanding is also a great oppressor: but he that hateth covetousness shall prolong his days. A man that doeth violence to the blood of any person shall flee to the pit; let no man stay him. Whoso walketh uprightly shall be saved: but he that is perverse in his ways shall fall at once. He that tilleth his land shall have plenty of bread: but he that followeth after vain persons shall have poverty enough. A faithful man shall abound with blessings: but he that maketh haste to be rich shall not be innocent. To have respect of persons is not good; for, for a piece of bread that man will transgress. He that hateth to be rich hath an evil eye, and considereth not that poverty shall come upon him. He that rebuketh a man, afterwards shall find more favour than he that flattereth with the tongue. Whoso robbeth his father or his mother, and saith, It is no transgression; the same is the companion of a destroyer. He that is of a proud heart stirreth up strife: but he that putteth his trust in the Lord shall be made fat. He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool: but whoso walketh wisely, he shall be delivered. He that giveth unto the poor shall not lack: but he that hideth his eyes shall have many a curse. When the wicked rise, men hide themselves: but when they perish, the righteous increase.”

THERE are, in Scripture, *two kinds of fear*. In this verse, fear is associated with happiness:—elsewhere we find it associated with *torment*.\* Such passages are in perfect harmony. The more, indeed, there is of the “love” that “casteth out fear”—the fear that “hath torment,” the more there will be of the *fear* in the verse before us. The fear of

\* 1 John iv. 18.

a *child*, and the fear of a *slave*, are two very different principles. The former is the product of love, and is ever proportionate to love. It is *affectionate* fear. We fear to displease one whose love is the spring to us of our purest and sweetest enjoyment. The child loves his father, and delights in his father's love to *him*. He cannot bear his frown. The very thought of his displeasure brings the tear to his eye.—This is the kind of fear which the child of God feels and cherishes toward his heavenly Father. He loves Him, he venerates Him. He finds his happiness in His smile. He dreads to offend Him. His frown is the death of his joy. This is the fear of God which His word inculcates—the *religious principle*. It is here contrasted with “*hardening the heart.*” It is therefore the gracious fear of a subdued and softened spirit,—the fear of love,—reverence for God,—fear of even His fatherly rebukes and corrections. It is self-distrust. It is tenderness of conscience. It is vigilance against temptation. It is the fear which inspiration opposes to high-mindedness, in the admonition—“Be not high-minded, *but fear.*” It is “taking heed lest we fall.” It is a constant apprehension of the deceitfulness of the heart, and of the insidiousness and power of inward corruption. It is the caution and circumspection that timidly shrinks from whatever would offend and dishonour God and the Saviour. And these the child of God will feel and exercise the more, the more he rises above the enfeebling, disheartening, distressing influence of the “fear which hath torment.”

To “*harden the heart,*” is to put away the fear of God; to be self-confident and presumptuous—unawed by threatenings—unsoftened by entreaties;—neither breaking under the one nor melting under the other. Of the man who thus “hardens” himself, final and irretrievable “*mischief*” must be the inevitable portion. On the contrary—“*Happy is the man that feareth alway.*” Wherein consists his happiness? This *fear* keeps him from sin; produces simplicity of dependence upon God; imparts the stability of peace,—“a peace that passeth all understanding;” maintains consistency of conduct; and thus gives growing evidence of

grace in the heart and of the hope being well-founded—a hope that “maketh not ashamed,”—of “glory and honour and immortality.”

Verse 15. “As a roaring lion, and a ranging bear; so is a wicked ruler over the poor people.” The “*wicked ruler*” is the ruler who, intoxicated with power, has aimed at it and obtained it for selfish purposes; who, instead of considering himself in his official capacity, as made for his people, fancies his people made for *him*,—tyrannizes over them,—selfish, avaricious, rapacious, turning everything, no matter by what means, to his own account. Such a man, instead of using all possible efforts to raise his subjects from a lower to a higher condition,—encouraging and animating them to industry, in order to their elevation and social prosperity,—rages at their poverty, because it does not furnish enough to himself,—does not fill his own treasures. He grinds, oppresses, and wastes them. He practises every exaction; his sole aim being to make the most of them for the time. He is the object of terror to his subjects. He is like a wild beast invading the herd or the flock,—tearing and devouring; a brutal monster without principle, and without heart.

Such a man may not be without *ability*. He may have talent enough for the invention and practice of any schemes of evil. But sometimes the absence of principle is united with the lack of mental capacity—wickedness with *weakness*:—(v. 16). “The prince that *wanteth understanding* is also a great oppressor,”—and thus a source of terror, an object of hatred, and exposed to sudden destruction from popular fury. “But he that hateth covetousness”—who establishes himself in the affections and confidence of his people by justice and mercy, and by every liberal and generous endeavour to promote their best interests,—identifying himself with them,—making their honour and their happiness his own;—he “*shall prolong his days.*”

The maxims here are, in the spirit of them, applicable to *all* power and influence, and especially to authority over the poor and the dependent. A man’s honour, happiness, and safety are intimately associated with using that authority with



moderation, with gentleness, with benevolent liberality, with upright and generous principle. Next to the security which lies in the protection of God, is that which arises from possessing the grateful love of fellow-men, attached by a feeling of thankful obligation. And, in the present instance, the two go together. God and men alike surround such an one with their favour as with a shield.

Verse 17. "A man that doeth violence to the blood of any person shall flee to the pit; let no man stay him." This verse might be taken in connection with the preceding—as presenting a further description of the same character there depicted. The cruelty of an oppressive ruler frequently incurs *blood-guiltiness*. Thus it was with Ahab in the case of Naboth; thus has it been in thousands of instances. Whatever be the high station of him who acts the murderer's part—how independent and irresponsible soever he may imagine himself to be,—vengeance shall pursue him:—his sin will find him out. Even his crown and sceptre shall not protect him from righteous retribution. There is a higher than he—the "righteous Lord who loveth righteousness." Both on Ahab and Jezebel came the blood of Naboth. But the words may be taken more comprehensively,—in reference to murder by whomsoever committed. For the comparatively innocent—the unintentioning manslayer,—the cities of refuge were of old appointed; to protect him from the avenger of blood who might rise against him when his spirit was hot, and slay him without a trial. But for the murderer there was no refuge, and no atonement. For him no blood could avail; no sanctuary could protect him. From the very altar of God, if he betook himself to it, he was to be dragged to death.

Such seems the force of the somewhat remarkable language here employed. He shall "*flee to the pit;*" that is, he shall *in vain attempt to escape*. He may flee; but his very flight shall be "to the pit,"—to the very destruction he is seeking to shun. "*The pit*" does not appear to signify here, directly and literally, the bottomless pit, the pit of final woe; but rather, according to a figurative sense of it, *covert and unexpected mischief and ruin*. The very means he takes

to effect his escape shall betray him to punishment. It is in this sense that the prophet uses the term when he says—"fear, and *the pit*, and the snare are upon thee, O inhabitant of the land."\*

God's jealous regard for the life of man was strongly expressed at the second outset of our world's history; and expressed in terms of evident allusion to the early and awful violation of its sacredness in the antediluvian period:—"And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man. Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man," Gen. ix. 5, 6. For my own part, having examined the various principles of interpretation by which those who are for doing away *all* capital punishments have explained these words, I have not been able to satisfy myself with any one of them. They seem to be all forced and unnatural,—and, on different critical grounds, inadmissible. I cannot but regard the language as bearing no fair and natural interpretation but that which makes it a divine requisition, on the part of man, of *blood for blood*,—that is, of *life for life*; and as thus affording more than a *sanction*, as laying down a *requirement*. Though I am far from conceiving that we are bound by Jewish criminal law, yet in the law regarding murder there is so evident an allusion to this original and universal injunction,—and the language withal is so very pointed and emphatically reiterated—that I cannot go the length of those who would include *murder* among crimes to be punished with infliction short of death.† When set beside the original and universal law, it serves, by its very emphasis and peremptoriness, to confirm the ordinary interpretation of that charge to the second progenitors of our race as the just one, and to show, therefore, the universality of its obligation.

Those things which have become proverbial have generally a large amount of truth. It is a remark that has been

\* Comp. Isa. xxiv. 17, 18.

† See Numb. xxxv. 31—33.

so often made,—that we cannot account for it otherwise than by admitting it to be founded in fact, and verified by the frequency with which the fact has been observed to happen,—that murder seldom escapes detection, and the murderer seldom ultimately eludes punishment. The detection is often after the lapse of a long interval,—an interval that has rendered the case hopeless, and has thrown over it the shade of oblivion. And in not a few instances it has been effected by means of the most extraordinary, and, at times, of apparently the most accidental and trivial kind. Providence pursues the blood-guilty, even when man has given up the search, and brings him to light, and conviction, and his merited recompense, in ways of which man could never have imagined. The instances of this are such as to stamp the seal of truth on the divine assurance—“Surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every man’s brother will I require the life of man.”

One observation more. It can never, in these circumstances, be a duty to protect or screen a murderer. It must, on the contrary, be an incumbent duty to deliver him up. “*Let no one stay him,*” says the wise man. It is incumbent on every patriotic citizen, who would not expose the land to God’s “inquisition for blood,” to hunt out the murderer, and bring him to justice. It is a duty to God, and a duty to our country. It is a duty, though the criminal were “bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh.” The only effort we can make on his behalf,—and *that* we ought to make with all solicitude, is—to save him from the *second death*, by bringing him to “repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Let no one pronounce the effort *vain*. The perpetrators of the most fearful murder ever committed on the face of the earth,—obtained forgiveness and life. They obtained it through the virtue of the very blood which, “with wicked hands,” they shed. It “cleanseth from *all sin*.” There is no sin so aggravated in its guilt, as that the blood of Christ is not a sufficient propitiation for it. O! it is a comfort to be assured of this. The *least* guilty cannot be pardoned—cannot be saved with-

out it; and, blessed be God! the *most* guilty may! But let us not forget what incompetent judges we are of the amount of guilt in any. We are ever estimating guilt by the actions with which we are chargeable *towards men*, and the principles and the passions from which these actions proceed. We are apt to think there can be no malignity more criminal and deadly than that which imbrues its hand in a fellow-creature's blood. And yet—is hatred of man to be compared in guiltiness with *enmity against God*? If we are to form our estimate by the worthiness of the objects, and the claims they respectively have on our love,—there *can* be no comparison. It is true they are inseparable,—and the one springs from the other. But alas! how many there are who would be filled with horror, or with indignation, were any such thing imputed to them as the malice that prompts to murder, who would hear without the slightest stirring of emotion of any kind, the charge of *enmity against God*. And yet this is the *sin of sins*; the germ of all sin; and that which, entering essentially into all sin, makes it “exceeding sinful.” This enmity must be pardoned, else the essence of all guilt remains; and this enmity must be slain, and supplanted by love, else the essence of all moral pravity remains.

The sentiments of most if not all of the verses which follow, to the close of the chapter, have been, with various modifications, repeatedly before us.

We are afresh reminded, in the first place, of the advantage, both as regards the present life and the life to come, of stern integrity of principle, and of the ruinous consequences both to temporal and eternal interests of that headstrong, rebellious self-will that resists the authority and grace of God (v. 18.) “Whoso walketh uprightly shall be saved: but he that is perverse in his ways shall fall at once.”

Then we have anew, under a simple but expressive illustration, the tendency and results of steady perseverance on the one hand, and of idleness and profligacy on the other, (v. 19.) “He that tilleth his land shall have *bread enough*, and he that followeth after vain persons shall have *poverty*”

*enough;*” or, the one shall have plenty of bread and the other plenty of want. The expression in both clauses is the same in the original.

With the renewed commendation of diligence, the warning is again sounded (v. 20.) against “*hasting to be rich,*” and forgetting that rigid and unswerving fidelity which so secures alike the favour of fellow-creatures and of God himself, that “*the faithful man shall abound with blessings.*” And of him who “*hasteth to be rich*”—the man whose insatiable appetite is set on the world’s wealth,—mark the peculiar characteristic here mentioned, (v. 22.) “*He hath an evil eye,*” that is, especially, an *envious* and *covetous* eye. He covets all he sees. He grudges at the success of others; frets when another man makes more of a bargain than himself; cannot endure to see anything go past him; regards every one with the sullenness of discontent, and counts him as an enemy, that gets faster on than himself. When this passion takes full possession of the soul, it is a most unhappy one. It eats out the vitals of contentment and peace; and it contains a thousand temptations to evil practices for the more speedy attainment of its end;—the “*evil eye*” producing the *evil act*; the look that covets being akin to the hand that steals.

The following verse, viewed in connexion with the preceding, suggests forcibly the thought that the avaricious man is in imminent danger of being guided and influenced in *every* thing by a regard to *his own interest*; and will be ever disposed to decide in causes that may come before him, according as this is likely to be affected; while the verse itself assures us, in striking terms, that there is hardly anything that can come before a judge or an arbitrator, in which there may not be some consideration fitted to sway him, if he do not set himself, with decidedness of purpose, against “*respect of persons.*” The man who once gives way to it, and who allows his conscience to yield to any such temptation, or to any such laxity of principle,—may come to practise iniquity for the merest trifle, and to sin without remorse:—“*For a piece of bread that man will transgress.*”

Then we have a fresh statement of the advantage of “*re-*

*buke*" above "*flattery*." Rebuke is most apt to irritate, when *conscience*, the inward secret monitor, bears silent witness to the truth of that for which it is administered. None are so irritable under it as those who are previously dissatisfied with themselves. But although irritation may be the effect at first—verse 23. "He that rebuketh a man, afterwards shall find more favour than he that flattereth with the tongue."

We should learn the important lesson not to withhold rebuke, when circumstances require its administration, on account of its *first effects*, and not by these effects to be startled or discouraged. We should not look for immediate confession, or fancy we have failed, because our "rebuke" has at the time produced even anger. Let our friend have leisure to think, to consider, to cool. It is with "rebuke" just as it is with a *controversy*. We should not expect a man with whom we engage in an argument, to give in at the moment of discussion. We should state and urge our arguments; and then leave them to be thought of and weighed afterwards, and, in the moments of calm consideration, let them work their way to conviction at leisure. The case is not to be regarded as hopeless, merely because feeling himself perhaps hard-pressed, he has got a little heated, and spoken keenly and dogmatically. Don't press your advantage too eagerly at the time:—dismiss the subject, and let his judgment dwell coolly upon it after. Do the same, when you have administered a reproof. If it irritates, and draws forth hasty and passionate words,—keep your temper; answer not again. Say no more, but leave him to come to himself. You may then experience the truth of the verse. It is not, remember, *at the time*, but "*afterwards*"—that "he that rebuketh a man finds more favour than he that flattereth with the tongue."

"Verse 24. "Whoso robbeth his father or his mother, and saith, It is no transgression; the same is the companion of a destroyer."—Here is something for the younger portion of my audience. Young people are sometimes apt to fancy that they may make more free with what is in the house,—what is the property of their parents, than with what belongs to others,—to regard it as in a manner their own,—

and hardly to imagine that they are alienating it when they appropriate it to their own use. But it is a sad mistake. Beware of the disposition. There is evil, and there is danger in it. For, *first*, What belongs to parents—*is not yours*: and to take to yourselves what is *not your own*, without express request and permission, is, beyond question, a direct breach of the eighth commandment. It is *stealing*. Attempt not to evade this: for, *secondly*, The property of parents ought to be peculiarly sacred—not less, but more so than any other. A feeling should attach to it somewhat like that which attaches to *holy things*, things pertaining to God and to his service. The violation of *their* property should be felt as a description of *sacrilege*. *Thirdly*, There are involved in it,—although you may not be so sensible of it as you ought to be,—ingratitude, disobedience, disrespect,—and deceit and concealment, toward those with whom, of all on the face of the earth, there should be most of openness,—the openness of daylight sincerity and confidence. I can conceive few things worse,—more ominous of evil,—than when a young person practises deception upon a parent. And, *lastly*, This kind of freedom, when once ventured upon—*grows*. It serves to cherish a covetous spirit. It tempts to extravagant courses, of which the means are thus accessible; and such courses tempt further to *other* means of maintaining them.

Thus the disposition and practice in question *tend to ruin*—to ruin both temporal and eternal. The youth who begins by home pilferings, is preparing to be “a companion of the destroyer,”—of those who destroy both themselves and others. Such associates will tempt him to *more extensive* pilferings, and make him the tool of their base machinations and crimes.

And this suggests a counsel to *parents*. The counsel is—to beware of being *too hard* with their children. To give them much money, and to indulge them in all their desires, is infallibly to spoil them, and train them to evil. But the opposite extreme,—allowing them nothing,—giving them no indulgence, no gratification,—but treating them as if self-

denial were the one and only virtue they had to learn,—is tempting them to *take* what should rather be *given* them, and endangering their principles of open integrity and honesty. On such a subject, as on many others, no precise rule can possibly be laid down. Every parent must learn to mingle affectionate indulgence with discreet and firm restraint; so as to make children sensible (this is the whole mystery) that you wish to make them happy, and to deny them nothing in mere caprice,—nothing which is right and good for them to have. While a child may be spoiled and ruined by injudiciousness and excess of gratification, parents must not, on this account, jump to the opposite extreme. The case is hardly more promising, when a child is *so* made to *feel restraint*, as that he ever secretly indulges the longing *wish to be free*.

Verse 25. “He that is of a proud heart stirreth up strife: but he that putteth his trust in the Lord shall be made fat.” The phrase for “He that is of a proud heart” is in the original “He that is *large in mind*.” And this is a phrase of which the meaning depends on the connexion in which it occurs. It is said of Solomon, that God gave him “largeness of heart, as the sand which is by the sea-shore.” But here the designation is used in a *bad* sense,—and seems properly enough translated. It describes the man of aspiring ambition,—full of large and grasping desires after the honour, wealth, and power of the world, and thus rendered discontented, haughty, and imperious. These are the men who have been the disturbers of the world’s peace:—ever restless, dissatisfied, envious, quarrelsome,—unhappy themselves, and the causes of unhappiness to others.

Men of such “proud heart” rouse *opposition*. This hinders their advancement; which aggravates the evil. Checked in their ambitious aims, they fret and fume, and are exasperated by whatever comes in their way. Hence “*strife*”—personal, domestic, and national feuds. And their pride is associated with high-minded *self-confidence*. They look to their own devices, their own resources, and their own power, *for* success; and *to* these they ascribe the success actually



obtained. "They sacrifice unto their net, and burn incense unto their drag."

But that spirit never can secure the smile of Heaven:—"He that putteth his trust in THE LORD shall be made fat." "*Trust in the Lord*" must not here, or anywhere else in Scripture, be understood of *inactive indolent expectation* of all things from Him. That is not *trust*; it is *presumption*: it is expecting what God has nowhere promised. He who "trusts in the Lord" is the man who is active in duty, and looks to the Lord for a blessing upon means,—who leaves the result in His hands; and is satisfied with His appointments. This man "*shall be made fat*:"—he has comfort and peace and happiness in all situations; an inward satisfaction, a heart-feast, a prosperity of soul, to which the other is a stranger.

Verse 26. "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool: but whoso walketh wisely, he shall be delivered."—He is ever, and justly, esteemed foolish, who puts confidence in a detected and known deceiver; and of all deceivers on earth *the human heart* is the least to be trusted. It has been, like the tempter who first introduced into it the principles of evil, "a liar from the beginning." Its inclinations change with the changing times, like the vane with the ever-veering and varying wind. How often does this happen in sickness, in adversity, in danger! Men think, and with confidence they say—if they were but well, if their life were but spared, if they were but brought up from their calamitous depression, if they were but saved from the threatening peril,—how differently they would live!—what altered characters the world would see them!—what they would *do*! and what they would *not* do! Health comes back; prosperity returns; the darkness dissipates; the danger passes over:—and all their goodness passes with it! Their fears are smiled at, and their resolves forgotten.

There are things too which we fancy and which we indignantly protest it impossible we should ever be induced to think of doing. We fire at the very association of our names with the supposition. And yet, when circumstances

change,—and when opportunity and temptation are united, we actually *do* what even in imagination we shrunk from,—wondering how any man should dare to deem it possible!—“He that trusteth in his own heart *is a fool.*” To such confidence nothing but self-ignorance can give birth, or can maintain it in being. It is palpable, whether in respect to the power of *enduring trials*,—of *bearing prosperity*,—of *using aright increasing wealth*,—of *resisting temptation*,—of *discharging duty*,—of *making sacrifice to principle*.—Blessed is he who “*walketh wisely*”—who (as this stands clearly in antithesis to the folly of self-reliance) walks in the fear of God, and with believing dependence on Him.

Behold anew the man of selfishness (verse 27), and mark well the description of him. He not only does not set himself to seek out objects for the exercise of his sympathy and kindness,—but turns away from such as present themselves. He “*hideth his eyes.*” He has no wish to see, because the seeing might oblige him to give. He pretends he cannot bear to see. He has a hundred excuses for not attending to petitions, of which the answer must come from his purse. Were *words* only wanted, he could keep both his eyes and his mouth open enough. Mark too the result—“*He shall have many a curse.*”

The sentiment of the closing verse is the same with that of the twelfth—“When the wicked rise, men hide themselves: but when they perish, the righteous increase.” Do seek the best interests of our country, by praying that our beloved Queen herself may be under the influence of the principles of true godliness, and preserved from the infection of all that is anti-protestant and anti-christian,—and that wise and faithful counsellors may ever be round her throne, men “fearing God and hating covetousness.”

## LECTURE LXXXVIII.

—◆—  
PROV. XXIX. 1—11.

“He, that being often reprovèd, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy. When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn. Whoso loveth wisdom rejoiceth his father: but he that keepeth company with harlots spendeth his substance. The king by judgment establisheth the land: but he that receiveth gifts overthroweth it. A man that flattereth his neighbour spreadeth a net for his feet. In the transgression of an evil man there is a snare: but the righteous doth sing and rejoice. The righteous considereth the cause of the poor: but the wicked regardeth not to know it. Scornful men bring a city into a snare: but wise men turn away wrath. If a wise man contendeth with a foolish man, whether he rage or laugh, there is no rest. The blood-thirsty hate the upright: but the just seek his soul. A fool uttereth all his mind: but a wise man keepeth it in till afterwards.”

THE opening verse is one of many solemn admonitions in the divine word which require more of *impression* than of illustration. Is there an individual, who has been counselled and warned by parental authority and affection, expostulating, entreating, encouraging, correcting, rebuking;—who has heard many a kind admonition from the friends of his youth, and from the ministers of God’s word;—who has been visited and alarmed by the corrective afflictions of divine providence, and at once wooed by mercies and awed by judgments, —but who still “goes on in his trespasses,”—in his wicked, worldly, careless, ungodly course?—O let such a one listen *now* to this solemn and emphatic declaration—“*He that being often reprovèd, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.*”

Wilt thou “harden thy neck,” scorner? Wilt thou refuse

to bend to the yoke of divine authority? Wilt thou resist divine commands and divine invitations? "Despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and long-suffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" How unutterable the malignant baseness of the ingratitude which the too faithful representation of Solomon elsewhere implies—"Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil!" Recollect—*there is a limit*. You have not resolved for the future that you will *always* "harden your neck,"—that you never will give a serious thought to the interests of your better part and your better being;—but you flatter yourselves that it is *time enough*—that you will take it to heart *by and by*. Yet every day and every hour, you are becoming more callous. Every repetition of your refusal is settling you the more firmly in your habits of careless and worldly inconsideration. It is more than probable that some of you may recollect a time when you thought more and felt more than you do now; and, yet, in spite of this experience, you cherish the delusive idea that the tendency will be reversed, and that, instead of the same progress bringing you to think and feel still less than you do now, there will be a reaction, and that you will soften yourselves to reflection when you have got a little harder—when the indurating effects of sin and the world have steeled your hearts more thoroughly against the influence of what is good!—May not God in the end, after such a course, and as its merited reward, give you up to your own hearts' lusts? May not He justly say of you—"Let them alone?"—May He not, in righteous retribution, leave you to a reprobate mind? Since you have "hated truth," may He not suffer you to be the "dupes of lies?" and having wilfully turned away from Him and from His invitations, may He not allow "delusions strong as hell to bind you fast?" and let you sink to the grave and to perdition, "with a lie in your right hand?" And then—when the "sudden destruction cometh upon you"—appalling thought! it is "*without remedy!*" Then warnings, reproofs, invitations,

entreaties, will be for ever at an end; and nothing will remain but the unavailing anguish of regretted opportunities, that can never return.

The lesson of the following verse is for *youth*. How solicitous the wise man is for their wellbeing,—for their preservation from all the snares of evil! How often to impress his lessons and admonitions, he repeats them.\* In the latter clause of this verse, the phrase in the original is—“he that feedeth or feasteth harlots.” The *rake*—the dissolute abandoned spendthrift is meant, who, like the prodigal son in the parable, “wastes his father’s substance with riotous living”—“devours his living with harlots.” But ah! my young friends,—is the “spending of substance” all the father’s grief? *All!*—it hardly comes into the estimate in comparison. No: it is not the loss of the *substance*, but the loss of the *son*, that rends with agony the godly parent’s heart.

From the antithesis in the fourth verse between “*judgment*” and the “*receiving of gifts*”—or the *taking of bribes*, it is obvious that by *judgment* is to be understood the exercise of the judicial function, and of the entire function of government, in the spirit and on the principles of stern unbending equity and impartiality, as opposed to venality, corruption, selfish partiality and respect of persons:—and we have affirmed anew the benefit to a country of the one, and the ruinous consequences of the other:—“The king by judgment establisheth the land: but he that receiveth gifts overthroweth it.”

The topic of the next verse is another to which we have found Solomon making repeated and pointed reference—“A man that flattereth his neighbour spreadeth a net for his feet.”† *Spreading a net for the feet* of another—laying snares and traps for him, is what no man ever thinks of doing but for some purpose of *mischief*. And such is the evil of *flattery*. It is a snare spread for the feet. And it is often spread very dexterously. The experienced flatterer knows

\* Comp. chap. xxiii. 24, 25; xxviii. 7, 19

† See chap. xxvi. 23—28.

well what will *take best* with different characters. You have heard possibly of the man who tried every thing he could possibly think of, but without success; and who finished the whole of his insinuating address by telling the object of his adulation, and whom it was his interest and his aim to win,—that he was the first he had met with in all his experience, who was *proof against flattery*. This was the very flattery that gained the day:—and all that had gone before was only an artful preparation for this. Be *jealous then of flatterers*, and *jealous of yourselves*. There is *no flattery* of which it can be truly said that it is harmless. In the verse before us, Solomon does not refer solely to *the intention of the flatterer*; he refers also to *the tendency of the flattery*. The latter may be far from harmless, even although, to a great degree, the former may. Injury may be done, and many a time is done, when no harm is meant to the party, and when there is no interest of our own to serve. And there is no little guilt on the part of those, who, seeing vanity to be a man's failing, set themselves of purpose to feed it,—pouring into the ear, merely in the way of an amusing experiment, every description of fulsome adulation, trying how much, and in what variety, it will be taken in. The experiment is a cruel one. But it has another and a more direct ingredient of evil—*falsehood*. You cannot flatter thus without *lying*:—and it is much to be feared, there is no small amount of falsehood uttered in this way, of the turpitude of which they who are chargeable with it never think.

Verse 6. “In the transgression of an evil man there is a snare: but the righteous doth sing and rejoice.” In the former part of this verse, the expression is general; and the question naturally suggests itself—“A snare to *whom?* to *himself*, to *others*, or to *both?*”—I should answer the *last*; there being no restriction in the words, there is neither necessity nor warrant for making one. Often is the designing villain ensnared by his own devices—by his own schemes of wickedness. His foot is taken in his own net:—the trap which he had set for another catches and maims himself. Then the latter part of the verse is realized. The righteous praise God

with songs of rejoicing;—thanking Him with gladdened hearts for their deliverance and safety, and for His righteous judgments on those who had unrighteously, without any desert of theirs, been plotting mischief against them. But the words are equally applicable to the *tendency of sin*,—of sin of every kind,—to the delusion and destruction of him who commits it. Scripture speaks of “the deceitfulness of sin:” and who is there that has not known and that has not felt it?—In the idea of a *snare* we have the conception of something *concealed*, — of a danger that *does not appear*, and into which a man may fall before he is aware. Thus it is with the sinner who goes on in his trespasses, who persists in his course of wayward rebellion. The evil does not immediately follow the commission of the sin to which he is tempted. “Sentence against his evil work is not executed speedily.” He finds himself, after the perpetration of it, as he was before. No judgment overtakes him. Conscience speaks; but he feels himself safe, and he succeeds in silencing it. He is encouraged to repeat the sin; and with less and less of remorse. The remonstrances of the inward monitor becoming less and less distinct, he adds iniquity to iniquity,—still enticed onwards and onwards in the way of evil. Now, in all this there is “*a snare*,” a perilous and fatal snare. He is lured on to a ruinous end. He falls into it at last, and perishes.\*

The antithesis is remarkable:—“*But the righteous doth sing and rejoice.*” He has joy in the inward “testimony of his conscience.” He has joy in the God of his salvation. He has joy in the good hope of the gospel;—“a hope that maketh not ashamed,” because, in the way of faith and obedience, “the love of God is shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Spirit.” And this state of spirit in which he “rejoices with joy and singing,” he possesses in the midst of all the privations, trials, and sorrows of the present life.—In this joy there is no “snare,”—no snare in the path in which

\* See for this general lesson of the sinner’s danger—chap. v. 21—23. And for the same general lesson, in connexion with the more particular and special one—chap. xi. 5, 6; xii. 13.

it is experienced. There is nothing deceitful, nothing bewildering, nothing disappointing in the ways of God, and truth, and holiness. Ways of *present* happiness, they end, not in disappointment, and shame, and ruin, but in "fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore."

Verse 7. "The righteous considereth the cause of the poor: but the wicked regardeth not to know it."—When the Apostle Paul is speaking of his being acknowledged as a fellow-worker by "James, Cephas, and John," and of his getting from them "the right hand of fellowship," that while they went to "the circumcision, he should go to the Gentiles," the particular stipulation which he mentions is a very remarkable one:—"Only they would *that we should remember the poor.*" There is nothing in which, both in spirit and letter, there is a more perfect harmony between the Old and New Testament Scriptures, than the regard of God to the poor, and the injunctions of a special regard to them on the part of His people.

As it is not the *cause* of the poor, in a general way, that is here mentioned, but "the *cause* of the poor,"—we may consider the verse as bearing more especially on the duty of magistrates and judges—of persons occupying situations of authority and influence as far as possible to protect their interests. In this view we may take, in connexion with it, verse fourteenth—"The king who faithfully judgeth the poor"—who protects his rights and avenges his wrongs, even when these rights have been invaded and these wrongs perpetrated by the aristocracy of his land, by the nobles that surround his throne, and whose favour it might seem most natural for him to court and most available for him to secure,—the king who thus, in judgment and in his general administration, shows the impartiality of uncompromising and incorruptible principle—"his throne shall be established for ever." He settles it on a secure basis,—in the affections of the masses of the people, and in the respect, admiration, and awe of the nobility themselves. They cannot but approve and admire even what they may not personally like. And moreover, if his poor subjects that are thus protected and



vindicated by him are of the number of the godly,—how much may he owe of the stability of his throne and the prosperity of his government, to the prayers of these lowly and despised ones, who, how overlooked and neglected soever by men, have the ear of the Supreme Ruler,—“have power with God, and prevail!”

Let it be especially observed from the terms of the *seventh* verse, that *disregard* of the cause of the poor is part of the character of the wicked; and is itself wickedness:—while the *consideration* of the cause of the poor is a part of the character of “the righteous,” and is itself a part of practical righteousness. There is in the former an unprincipled setting aside of the great rule of right between man and man,—a rule of universal and indispensable obligation on “high and low, rich and poor together”—the golden rule—the royal law;—and there is a defiance of all the express injunctions enforced by the example of Jehovah himself.

Those described in the first clause of the following verse—“*The scornful*”—are such as, in their *conduct* and their *measures*, regard not the restraints of divine authority, hold in contempt the idea of apprehension from an over-ruling Providence, neither fearing its vengeance nor seeking its protection and blessing; despise counsel and advice; dash forward with self-sufficient and self-confident recklessness; and too often infect the people with the same spirit of ungodly presumption. They “*bring the city,*” that is the country at large, (the metropolis or seat of government being taken as the representative of the kingdom) “*into a snare.*” It is not discovered till it is too late for the application of any remedy;—and there is at once danger from human enemies, and danger from the judicial displeasure of an offended God. Thus, many a time, did the rulers bring Jerusalem “into a snare”—involving the people with themselves in divine visitations.\*

\* See Isa. xxviii. 14—22 compared with Matt. xxvii. 20, with verses 39—43. And what was the consequence? Ans. Luke xxiii. 27—31 and xix. 41—44. Thus the rulers of Israel *brought* the wrath upon the nation by their counsel and example.

“The *wise who turn away wrath*,” are the men who are humble and receive counsel, who “order their affairs” with combined integrity and prudence,—with decision yet with caution; men who, under the influence of religious principle themselves, diffuse that influence among others. They “turn away wrath,”—the wrath of *enemies* by their discreet measures uniting the honour of their country and its security with the spirit of conciliation and peace and amity;—and the wrath of *God* by their counsels and by their prayers. They *rescue* from “the snare.” They prevent or they avert danger. They propitiate and pacify, instead of provoking. One of the very strongest modes in which Jehovah declares to his ancient people His fixed determination to punish them for their sins, is that which avers the unavailingness of the intercessions even of such men as stood highest in His favour for turning away His displeasure. They should deliver themselves alone.\*

Let us be thankful that we have an advocate with the Father, by whose intercession—(such is the Father’s delight in Him—such the unlimited influence of His mediation)—there is no amount of merited wrath that may not be turned away. The influence or “power with God” of the very best of men and greatest “saints of the Most High” that ever lived, has still been limited. But to CHRIST there is nothing which the Father will deny. If you come to Him in faith, and make Him your friend, your cause with God will be safe. “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red as crimson, they shall be as wool.” If you are wise, you will take this way of “*turning away wrath*;” and to this all who are “wise to win souls” will counsel you. Every other counsel will leave you exposed to “the wrath of God;” and it will “*abide upon you*.”

Verse 9. “If a wise man contendeth with a foolish man, whether he rage or laugh, there is no rest.” This verse is capable of different interpretations, according as we understand the reference of the pronoun “*he*” in the words

\* See Ezek. xiv. 13—30.

‘whether *he* rage or laugh.’ This some highly respectable commentators consider as referring to the “*wise man*,” and as signifying the different methods he adopts, according to the different tempers of the persons he has to deal with, for turning them from their folly—“whether he be angry at them, or endeavour by gentler means, to reason or laugh them out of their folly.” With all due deference, I am disposed to differ, and to regard the words as referring to the “*foolish man*,” and as expressing the different ways in which he may receive the reasonings, remonstrances, and persuasions of the man of wisdom. The “*foolish man*” may, as in other cases, mean the ungodly man, and the “*wise man*” the man that fears God. In which case the “*contending*” may refer to the appeals and pleadings of the latter against the wicked practices of the former. He will sometimes receive them with resentment and proud passion, and sometimes with scornful laughter and bantering mirth. In either case, “*there is no rest*.” There is no satisfactory result; and “the wise man” is in danger of being thrown off his own guard, and losing his temper, and exposing himself; which will only increase the turbulence,—either the rage or the mirth, of the fool.

But “*contending with a foolish man*” may signify entering into discussion—disputing some point with him. A wise man should rather shun engaging with such a disputant—especially where the want of principle is associated with weak capacity. The latter may often be found abundantly fond of disputation—eager to get into an argument. But there is no comfort or satisfaction *in* it, no end *to* it, and no good *from* it. In all discussion, the one object of the “*wise man*” is *truth*. He will not think of “*contending*” for anything else. But the “*foolish man*” cares not for this. He is confident he has truth already. He wishes nothing but a dispute. He is, in his self-sufficiency, eager to *show off*—to display his powers—powers hidden from all but himself; and is therefore ever ready and eager to enter the lists. There are the two ways here mentioned, in the one or the other of which such a man may receive and encounter you;—with violent anger, or with contemptuous laughter. The anger may arise

from one or other of two causes,—*your* not at once admitting the force and conclusiveness of *his* arguments, or *his* finding himself puzzled and pinched by the force of yours;—while the laughter (which may be the very cover of felt though not confessed perplexity,) at your alleged silliness and blindness, in reasoning so weakly yourself, and not seeing what is so very plain,—the laughter of self-complacency and self-consequence. It is not easy to say which of the two is the more provoking; whether he blusters and storms and fumes with passion,—or whether he laughs and scouts, and turns to banter and ridicule all you say,—“*there is no rest.*” The wise man’s object is, to bring matters *to a point*; to leave discussion, when enough has been said, and to *rest* in the conviction of truth. But he cannot get to this. There is no silencing a *fool*. There is no end to either his heated and impetuous or to his scornful and laughing talk. Whether you answer him, or answer him not, he will, in either case, “rage” the more, or “laugh” the more. Nothing can be made of him. The wise man, having once entangled himself, may find it no easy matter to get out again with comfort or with credit.

When you meet with a man who is very eager for a discussion,—keen-set upon it, and who will not let you alone, till he has forced you to it,—you may be pretty sure that the object of that man is *an argument*,—an argument for the argument’s sake; that he has the fondness of a fool for fighting; that of course his mind is already made up, and that he only wishes to show how he can beat you off; that it is the battle he wants, and the victory,—not *the truth*, which he has already taken for granted. He is likely to prove a fool,—more *hot-headed* than *clear-headed*; in arguing with whom you will beat the air. Better let him alone;—unless you wish an interminable altercation, with no rest while it continues,—and no resting-place at its close,—rather when it ceases without coming to a close at all.

“*But the just seek his soul*”—is susceptible of *two senses*. It may mean first, the just seek *the life*—the welfare, temporal and eternal—of *their persecutors*—of their blood-

thirsty enemies, at whose hands they are suffering—it may be, even unto death. Such was the case with David and Saul; with Christ and his murderers; with Paul and his unbelieving countrymen; with Stephen and those who “gnashed upon him with their teeth,” and cast him out of the city, and stoned him;—and with all the prophets, apostles, and martyrs, in the bloody history of intolerance.

2. They may mean—and probably *do* mean—that the upright, in opposition to the blood-thirsty by whom the just is hated, “seek his soul,”—that is, the soul or life of the object of the hatred—of the just or the upright. Of the Lord himself it is said—“He loveth the righteous.” And in this all His people resemble Him. It is one of their characteristic distinctions. They pray for the upright, and endeavour, by all means in their power, to preserve them from the deadly machinations of their persecutors. The amount of love required *of* God’s people *towards* God’s people is that they be ready to “lay down their lives for the brethren.” And if “for *the brethren*”—how much more for **THE JUST ONE**. We should think of our lives as nothing, when the alternative is the forfeiture of his love. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea set an example of this, when not only did the former plead for Jesus during his life, when his enemies were exasperated against him and plotting his destruction,—but both came forward, at the most perilous crisis of his history, and avowed themselves on the side of the Crucified. And such is the love which Jesus expressly demands towards himself.

Verse 11. “A fool uttereth all his mind: but a wise man keepeth it in till afterwards.”\* It is obvious that this is another instance in which *folly* is to be understood of weak-minded indiscretion: for the unprincipled are deep enough in their counsels, and cautious enough in the communication of them. While the “*wise man*” chooses time, place, and company, for what he says,—especially when it relates to any matter that is important, or of which the beneficial issue depends on secrecy and caution—the fool minds

\* Comp. chap. xii. 23; xiv. 33; xv. 2.

nothing of the kind. He thinks not of proprieties or of consequences. He speaks out at all times, in all places, and in all companies alike;—no matter to him:—he must speak; and, while many a time he speaks without thinking, it is a rare thing for him to think without speaking. If he has nobody else to talk to, he will rather talk to himself than be silent;—and in too many instances, it were well were he confined to his own company! For, whatever occurs to him coming out, no matter when, where, or to whom, there is incessant danger every time he opens his lips before others. Be it yours ever to act, in this respect, the part of the *wise*. Guard well your tongue. With intelligence and sound discretion, duly *time* your words, and duly *weigh* them; and let all you do say be marked by calmness, temperance, dignity, and truth.

## LECTURE LXXXIX.

—◆—  
PROV. XXIX. 12—18.

“If a ruler hearken to lies, all his servants are wicked. The poor and the deceitful man meet together; the Lord lighteneth both their eyes. The king that faithfully judgeth the poor, his throne shall be established for ever. The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame. When the wicked are multiplied, transgression increaseth: but the righteous shall see their fall. Correct thy son, and he shall give thee rest; yea, he shall give delight unto thy soul. Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he.”

It is natural, when we think of Solomon's own situation as king of Israel, to expect to find some of his maxims of proverbial wisdom bearing special reference to the character and conduct of men in power. And so it is. When, moreover, we think of the wisdom with which, at the outset of his reign, and at his own earnest request, he was divinely endowed, we as naturally anticipate a correspondence between the maxims and the character. Nor are we disappointed. The maxims are not those of the selfishness of power,—not those of arbitrary despotism or the sovereignty of royal will; nor are they those of an artful, intriguing, Machiavelian policy. They are sound and liberal, and based on the great principle of the public good being the end of all government,—the principle that kings reign, not for themselves, but for their people; while, in all their administration, they ought to be swayed and regulated by the laws of an authority higher than their own, by a regard to the will of God as their rule, and the glory of God, to which all else must ever

be subordinate, as their supreme aim. But we must not forget, that the Book of Proverbs forms part of the canon of inspired Scripture; that it does not contain, therefore, the mere dictates of human wisdom, how extraordinary soever that wisdom was; that “a greater than Solomon is here.”

Verse 12. “If a ruler hearken to lies, all his servants are wicked.”—It becomes the interest of them all to lie and to deceive him; and the competition will then be, who can ply this wretched trade most artfully and most effectually. When it is perceived that truth is not welcome, and that a man gets nothing by straightforward honesty but a frown and dismissal,—“all will be *wicked*,” for all will be *liars*. Flattery and slander become the staple of their communications to the ear of their master; the latter to serve the purposes of the former, and the former to make the latter go down,—the good that is artfully spoken of himself opening his ear to the more easy and credulous admission of the evil that is said of others. The upright being incapable of yielding to the general example, are made the victims of detraction and calumny, and are by this means either constrained to withdraw, or are put away from before the throne, and so leave it beset with wickedness,—the wickedness of flattery, falsehood, treachery, and malice. The jealousies of the monarch are awakened,—jealousies both personal and official, both as it respects himself and as it respects his government; and there comes to be brought into operation that most accursed of all systems—the system of *espionage*,—of spies and informers, plying all the arts of a despicable and villanous deceit,—fastening themselves on individuals, insinuating themselves into their confidence, tempting them to familiarity, and worming out their secrets; artfully intruding themselves into the social circle, in every class of society; “speaking lies in hypocrisy,” so as to open hearts and elicit discoveries, and lead on the simple even to language stronger than they would ever think of using;—and all this for the purpose of pleasing and poisoning the royal ear, and ruining the objects of their mean and treacherous venality and villany. Such spies and informers have



been justly designated “the pestilent vermin of a nation.” The monarch that has recourse to them deserves not to reign. There is hardly a conceivable case in which the employment of such a system can be vindicated.

The principle of the verse is quite capable of application in other cases than that of the monarch. It is true of *masters*. If a master “hearken to lies,”—keeping an ear ever open to their admission,—“all *his* servants are wicked.” They imbibe the spirit of falsehood, and study the vile arts of flattery and malice; thus the conscientiously and sternly upright are kept or driven from their domestic establishments. Let masters and mistresses guard against those servants who discover a disposition to ingratiate themselves into special favour by smooth words and “fair speeches;” by great assurances of their own fidelity, and sly insinuations against their fellow-servants. *They are cheats*.—*Parents* too may take a lesson. Let them beware of listening to the fawnings of artful childhood and youth; and above all of giving any encouragement to tale-bearing. This can seldom be practised without *lying*; and it is itself a wicked and dishonourable thing. That there may be cases in which it becomes the duty of one child to reveal the words and doings of another I am far from denying. But the spirit and manner which distinguish the child that discovers what conscience will not allow it to keep secret, for the sake of the brother or sister, as well as of father and mother, and that does so by constraint and of necessity, are widely different from those of the cunning, selfish tell-tale. Would you, parents, have your children simple-hearted, honourable, generous, and noble-minded?—frown from you every approach to the coaxing and insinuating malice of tale-bearing, and cherish amongst your children the mutual open confidence of affection and truth,—teaching all to be the guardians of each other’s character and honour, to love one another, and to be eager to tell of each other the tale of good rather than of evil.

Verse 13. “The poor and the deceitful man meet together; the Lord lighteneth both their eyes.”—There is a sen-

timent in a former chapter\* analogous to the one in this verse, but by no means the same:—"The rich and the poor meet together; the Lord is the maker of them all." The word in this verse translated "*the deceitful man*" is used nowhere else in Scripture. Some understand it of the *creditor*, and some of the *usurer*. The latter is probably near the truth:—the man who takes advantage of the necessities of the poor to exercise extortion,—to exact from them,—to "grind their faces." The two "*meet together*,"—in the intercourse of life, and in the transactions of business:—the one *in need*, the other taking advantage of the need.

The case was provided against by the Mosaic law;† and the conduct enjoined by that law is enforced by the consideration in the verse before us:—"The Lord lighteneth both their eyes." There are instances in which the enlightening of the eyes has reference to the *mind*—to the *understanding*—and is to be interpreted accordingly, as signifying the *imparting of discernment*—the giving of knowledge, or the capacity to receive it. But such does not seem to be the sense here. It appears to mean no more than that the Lord *sustains the life* of both, and at the same time is the giver of all that *cheers* it, according to a very common and natural sense of the word *light*.‡ In all our ordinary phraseology regarding life and death, there is frequent reference to the "*eyes*." The dimming and darkening of the eyes is one of the indications of life being on the wane, and a very remarkable feature in the dying scene. We speak of the shades of death coming over the eyes; of the fixing and glazing of the eyes, in that solemn hour; and of their being closed in death. The sentiment, then, I conceive, is—that "the poor and the usurer" have alike every moment's existence and every moment's enjoyment from God. "In Him," alike, they both "live and move and have their being."

The next question of course is—What is the lesson that is thus taught? The answer is—

1. There is a motive or inducement to the poor, to put

\* See chap. xxii. 2.

† See Exod. xxii. 25, 26.

‡ Compare Psalm xiii. 3: 1 Sam. xiv. 27.

their trust in Him who is “the God of their life and the length of their days.” He has, in His providence, assigned them an humble lot. But they have their life from Him; and their times are in His hand. The life He has given He does not overlook. He marks and sustains it.

2. There is also a lesson to the usurious and unfeeling oppressor of the poor,—a motive to him to consider what he is doing. The poor whom he is thus using—so selfishly and so cruelly, is the creature of the same God with himself, and is sustained moment after moment by the same power and goodness. There is some thing very shocking in the thought of rendering that life miserable which the blessed God has given, and which He is every instant maintaining;—in the idea that the eyes which HE is ever lightening, a fellow-creature should be dimming with the tears of bitterness. While God is giving to the poor “the light of life,” it surely becomes us, instead of quenching that light and making that life wretched, to do what lies in our power to make the possession of it worth retaining,—to supply their need, and to comfort their hearts.

Verse *fourteenth* was noticed with verse second.—And having formerly,\* and more than once, touched on the subject of early education, and especially, as a part of it, necessary and salutary correction, explaining its principles, and giving directions for its practice, I do not now again enter into the subject, which is afresh brought before us in verses fifteenth and seventeenth—“The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame. Correct thy son, and he shall give thee rest; yea, he shall give delight unto thy soul.”

Verse 16. “When the wicked are multiplied, transgression increaseth: but the righteous shall see their fall.”—The former part of this verse seems almost like a *truism*. The *multiplication of the wicked*, and the *increase of transgression*, are next to one and the same thing:—the former being the increase of the *agents of evil*, and the latter of the

\* See chap. xxii. 15; xxiii. 13, 14.

*evil done.* They are different; but they are inseparable; the one necessarily includes the other. The meaning may be, that wicked men encourage and embolden one another in iniquity; and that, by this means, the corruption spreads. Or,—as in the second verse of the chapter, the same word here rendered “*are multiplied*” is translated “*are in authority*”—the reference is, in all probability, to the influence of wicked rulers in promoting the increase of wickedness in the community; which requires not either illustration or proof.—“*But the righteous shall see their fall.*”\*—Their fall, that is, *from power and authority.* It is not the *final fall*—the *perdition* of the wicked, that is intended. In that the righteous have *no pleasure.* Herein they resemble God;—are of one mind and heart with Him. He says, and confirms it by his oath—“*As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked.*” In the execution of the sentence against them, God glorifies himself; and the righteous solemnly acquiesce,—acknowledging and celebrating the justice of the divine administration:—“*Even so, Lord God, Almighty, for true and righteous are thy judgments!*” But pleasure in witnessing the execution of the sentence, we cannot, we must not, for a moment, imagine them to have.

In this spirit, then—the spirit of compassionate apprehension and fear, we would, with all earnestness, warn and entreat the ungodly. We would beseech “the wicked to forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and to turn unto the Lord who will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.”

Verse 18. “*Where there is no vision the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he.*” By “*vision*” is to be understood *divine communication.* Such communications, indeed, were imparted in different ways—“*at sundry times and in divers manners;*” but it is clear that the word “*vision*” here is to be taken comprehensively of them all.†

\* Comp. Psal. xxxvii. 34—36; Psal. xci. 8.

† Comp. 1 Sam. iii. 1. Things are estimated in value according to

In the absence of such communications, “the people *perish*.” The word thus rendered has been variously understood. By one eminent critic it is translated—“*will apostatize*.” By others it is rendered “*are made naked*,”—in the sense in which, on the occasion of the golden calf, Aaron is said to have “made the people naked to their shame.” By others still—“*are dispersed*,”—as our Lord is said to have “had compassion on the multitude, because they were faint and were *scattered abroad* as sheep having no shepherd.” The *spirit* of the passage remains unaffected.

The words do not of course imply that wherever there *is* “vision,”—that wherever divine revelation is enjoyed,—it has its proper effect on those who enjoy it. Alas! no. We might refer for striking and melancholy evidence of the contrary to the state of the world in the time of Enoch before the flood, and of Noah immediately after it; to the character of the Jewish people under the judges and the prophets; to the character of the same infatuated people in the days of Christ and his apostles; to the hardened unbelief and wickedness of those cities that saw the Saviour’s mighty works and repented not; and to the condition, in regard to religion and morals, of the great masses of the population in countries, such as our own, in which the clearest light of revelation shines, and has long shone.

But in one view all this is only confirmatory of the truth of the verse before us. It demonstrates and impresses the necessity of divine revelation; the need in which men universally stand of it; seeing *even with it*—even where it exerts all its restraining power,—men continue in their state of apostacy and rebellion.

Strictly speaking, the entire race should be regarded as in a state of apostacy,—apostacy from the revelation of God originally given to man in innocence; as the God of nature, and subsequently to his fall, as the God of salvation. The apostacy has continued with regard to the vast majority

their rarity or scarceness; and the word *precious* in this passage is of similar import with *scarce* or rare.

until the present day. There is "vision;" yet the people "perish." Jehovah sent his word to Israel. And what was the result? What was the manifestation of the character of human nature thence produced? Did not they show, in the midst of "vision,"—when enjoying privileges and means of knowledge and goodness such as had been bestowed on no other people,—an incessant tendency to depart from God?—to leave their own Jehovah for "the gods of the heathen that were round about them?"—to prefer human folly to divine wisdom,—the darkness of error to the light of truth? Yes: and of this propensity the false prophets were ever availing themselves, while the true were ever lamenting over it, and expostulating with it. But bad as things were, amid "line upon line and precept upon precept," how much worse would they have been, had the people been left with "*no vision!*" The rise of distinguished prophets often wrought for the time a wonderful change. Thus in the days when Elijah appeared,—the state of religion was very low. Elijah himself thought he was left alone as a worshipper of Jehovah. And, although in this he was mistaken, what were even the seven thousand of Jehovah's reserve compared with the millions of Israel? Elijah was the instrument of giving an effectual check to prevailing ungodliness, and of "turning their hearts back again" from Baal to the Lord their God. And similar was the effect on other occasions. The "vision" threw a light on the deepening gloom—the prophet, with divine authority and evidence, imparting and impressing his messages from Jehovah.

The Bible, and faithful teachers of its divine discoveries, are one of God's greatest blessings to the world. It has not unfrequently happened, in regions where the gospel has for a time flourished, and wrought its pleasing wonders in "turning men from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God," and in building up believers in their holy faith, and manifesting its salutary influence in the prevailing practice of what is "true honest, pure, lovely, and of good report,"—the rise and succession of a series of careless and unfaithful ministers, has completely altered the moral and spiritual aspect of the place; from life and vigour and

fruitfulness, to deadness and desolation, to lukewarmness, declension, and apostacy. What a blessing to such a region, when, in the providence of the Church's exalted Head, there comes a change of the opposite kind; when active, faithful, affectionate, and prayerful teachers start up amid the waste, and pitying the miserable destitution of the inhabitants, "preach the word, and are instant in season and out of season!"—They effect a revival; and, instead of "the people perishing," souls are converted and saved; and "the desert rejoices and blossoms as the rose." The increase of "vision," and the circulation of divine instruction works a change on which the eye of every good man,—every child of God, rests with a grateful delight.

Forget not the second part of the verse:—"But he that keepeth the law, happy is he." The words imply our *having* the law. If you *have* the law, and do *not* keep it, you expose yourselves to a heavier sentence of condemnation, than if you had it not. It will be emphatically for the worse to you, and not for the better, if you are found *possessors* only and not *improvers* of privilege,—*hearers* of the word, and *not doers*.

## LECTURE XC.

—◆—  
PROV. XXIX. 19—27.

“A servant will not be corrected by words; for though he understand he will not answer. Seest thou a man that is hasty in his words? there is more hope of a fool than of him. He that delicately bringeth up his servant from a child, shall have him become his son at length. An angry man stirreth up strife, and a furious man aboundeth in transgression. A man's pride shall bring him low: but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit. Whoso is partner with a thief hateth his own soul: he heareth cursing, and bewrayeth it not. The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe. Many seek the ruler's favour: but every man's judgment cometh from the Lord. An unjust man is an abomination to the just; and he that is upright in the way is an abomination to the wicked.”

Verse 19. “A servant will not be corrected by words; for though he understand he will not answer.” In interpreting *proverbs*, it is necessary to bear in mind, that from their very nature, as concentrating in brief expression, whether under a figure or in plain terms, some result of general and long-continued observation and experience,—they must always have some *general meaning*; and our object should be to find such a sense of the terms in which they are expressed as admits of such a meaning. Now in regard to this verse,—it would be rather hard on the class of society referred to in it, to apply the maxim with any thing approaching to universality;—as affirming that no servant, or that very few servants, will yield obedience to mere verbal orders, or be at all affected by verbal reprimands. On this account it is interpreted by some as ex-



pressing only the character of “the slothful, unprofitable, and wicked servant.” And thus it is in the Septuagint:—“*an obstinate or perverse servant will not be corrected by words.*” But this, you will observe, converts the saying into a mere *truism*—that an *obstinate* servant will *behave obstinately*; a saying entirely destitute of the salt of a proverb.—Now, the difficulty is taken away by rendering the word, instead of servant, *slave*. The general sentiment then expressed, is one which, judging from the principles of human nature, all would expect to find true, and the truth of which has the attestation of experience, wherever slavery has prevailed.—I enter not into the question of the abstract lawfulness of slavery—further than to say that it can never, unless directly enjoined by God *as a punishment*, be reduced to any thing like consistency with the grand general rule of all rectitude between man and man; and that not till a man can lay his hand on his heart and say, in any given circumstances—“*I should like to be a slave,*” can he be an honest advocate of slavery, or a conscientious slaveholder. But domestic and predial bondage was then, as it since has been, extensively prevalent. And the words before us are expressive of the natural tendency and effect of such bondage,—modified of course according to the measure of absolute property in the slave and power over him, prescribed by the laws of different communities. That tendency is to reluctant and constrained service. The service is not that of *affection*, but of *fear*. It is not rendered with willing and cheerful activity, but solely under the influence of the selfish dread of punishment. There is a constant proneness to *sullenness*; for which, accordingly, there *was* (I am glad to be able, even to any extent, to speak in the past tense) an appropriate term in the vocabulary of our own colonial slave-owners and slave-dealers—a proneness to *the sulks*. There is a backwardness to hear, because there is no will to obey. It is otherwise when service is rendered from attachment, and from felt interest in a master’s comfort and benefit. Nor does it at all follow, even with regard to *slaves*, that the natural tendency of their con-

dition may not be, to a great extent, counteracted by the power of kind and lenient treatment. Few in any situation, even the most unfavourable to the cultivation and exercise of the generous sensibilities, are entirely proof against the influence of these:—but of all states the state of slavery is the most prejudicial and destructive to the open and generous feelings of the heart, and to the influence of gratitude and obligation.

The argument against slavery, indeed, is powerful, from its tendency on *both* sides of the relation—that of the owner or master as well as that of the slave. In regard to the latter, it tends to the degradation, and prostrate depression to the very dust, of all mental dignity and energy,—as well as to produce resentment, and sullenness, and suspicious jealousy, and reluctant and heartless subjection:—and in regard to the former, its tendency is to engender and foster superciliousness, pride, and passion, severity and cruelty, and an unworthily light estimate of fellow-creatures,—brethren of the same great family, destined to the same immortality, subjects of the same sinfulness and guilt, and redeemed by the same price to the enjoyment of the same inheritance!

I need hardly remark that, to a certain extent, the same tendencies pertain to the relative position of master and servant, whether the latter be bond or free, and whether the former be a purchasing proprietor or a joint possessor of the same liberty. There are *rights* on either side: and while servants owe to their earthly masters their time and all their powers of active industry, and the application of these with cheerful and hearty readiness,—it will be well for masters and mistresses, on the other hand, to bear in mind that their servants are partakers with themselves of all human feelings and susceptibilities;—and that, if they judge of these from their own experience, and from the principle of the golden rule,—they will be at once sensible that, while necessarily maintaining their own place and expecting all due obedience, the most effectual means, generally speaking, of attaining their end, will be—their throwing into the manner of issuing their commands, and exacting the required

obedience, as much as possible of the spirit and practice of the law of kindness. And if they find tempers which even kindness will not subdue,—into which their attempts are vain to infuse the spirit of willing and cheerful activity,—they will have the inward consciousness that the fault has not been theirs.\*

For the illustration of the sentiment of the following verse—“Seest thou a man that is hasty in his words? there is more hope of a fool than of him,” the reader is referred to chap. xxvi. 12.

Verse 21. “He that delicately bringeth up his servant from a child, shall have him become his son at the length.” The reference in this verse seems to be to *home-born slaves*—slaves born in the house and brought up from childhood in the family,—while, under this particular reference there is conveyed a general principle—a maxim of wider application. Observe 1. The conduct is *unkind*. The child is supposed to be still intended for a slave,—though, from what cause soever of particular liking to it, it is “*brought up delicately*.” The training is unsuitable to the future station: it unfits him for it. Instead of being inured to subordination, and to the toils and hardships of a slave’s life, he is nurtured daintily, so as neither to be fit for them by habit, by strength, nor by anticipation. Were the intention to make him a freeman, and to let him be his own master, and follow his own will, and make his own fortune in the world, it would be well enough:—but to treat like a pet child one who is destined to slave it for life, is, however meant, really *cruel*.—And here the observation may be generalized. It applies to all cases in which persons are brought up in a way that does not accord with the prospects in life that are before them,—with the situations they are destined, or are even in providence *likely*, to fill. When they have been accustomed to a style of living quite above what they have any reason to anticipate, they cannot,

\* For the spirit in which the mutual duties of master and servant should be fulfilled, see Eph. vi. 5—9; Col. iii. 22—25, with iv. 1.

when the inferior prospects (to which they have never been taught to look forward) come to be realized, feel comfortable or happy. They are not in their element. Their habits unfit them for their occupations; so that they are at home in nothing;—while they feel all the while the depressing influence of disappointed hopes, and an unanticipated change—a sinking from the position they were wont to sustain, and the mode of living and of social intercourse they were accustomed to enjoy.—2. The conduct is *imprudent*. Expectations may be produced, which never can be gratified; foolish they may be, yet still not without some foundation,—expectations of being always treated as a member of the family, as a *child* instead of a slave. Nay, such as are crafty and insinuating in their address may, very naturally as human nature goes, take advantage of the partial liking discovered towards them, to ingratiate themselves further and further; and on some occasion when they have succeeded in making a specially favourable impression,—inducing the master to look with a more kindly eye upon them than ordinary,—may even by the arts of flattery and by sly insinuations against the heir, prevail so far as to supplant the children, and in part or in whole, dispossess them of their rightful patrimony. The master of the one—the father of the other—may do a thing in a moment of credulity and of passion, which he cannot recall, and over which he may grieve to the end of his days.

It is greatly conducive to the order and comfort of society, when all have the good sense and the principle to keep their respective places, with mutual good-will and cheerfulness. In the Scriptures, every thing said on the duties of masters and servants, is full of equity, propriety, and kindness. But the most righteous, honourable, and affectionate treatment of a servant, must not be considered as implying such indulgence as would prove to the injury of a child, or as would even unfit the servant for the situation which he or she is destined to fill, or is actually filling. There is not, in this, as in multitudes of similar cases, any possibility of laying down rules of universal observance;

—so much depends on diversity of disposition and tempers, so that what would be proper and safe with one would be wrong and hazardous with another. It is a most important qualification of a servant, on the one hand, to *know his own place*, and from a sense of propriety and duty, cheerfully to conform to it:—and on the other hand, nothing can be more unamiable and unchristian on the part of masters and mistresses than a haughty assumption of superiority, and a determination that a servant shall always be *made to feel* his situation. The duty is, so to mingle authority with gentleness, and dignity with kind condescension, as that the authority shall be promptly and cheerfully obeyed *without* being felt,—as that the servant shall be at ease and happy, in the full confidence that nothing equitable and reasonable will be wanting on his master's part, and nothing unjust or unreasonable exacted of him on his.—Christian servants, if they have good common sense along with their Christian principles, will beware of imagining that the equality of all in the church—the union of servant and master as fellow-disciples in the communion of the house of God, obliterates the lines of demarcation between the different classes in civil society. They will rather be anxious to show the contrary, especially in the eyes of men of the world, to avoid bringing unnecessary reflection and reproach on the religion they profess. It may be exceedingly painful to a Christian master to repress the undue forwardness which may be dictated by a false conception on this subject, associated with a deficiency in strength of mind;—whilst yet it may be indispensable:—only it should be done, not with *hauteur*, but with monitory and smiling kindness, or with sharpness of reprehension as varying tempers and circumstances may require. What says the Apostle? “Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed. And they that have believing masters, let them not despise them, because they are brethren; but rather do them service, because they are faithful and beloved, partakers of the benefit. These things teach and exhort,” 1 Tim. vi. 1, 2.

Verse 22. "An angry man stirreth up strife, and a furious man aboundeth in transgression." Why does Solomon dwell so often on the evil tendencies of the angry passions? For two reasons:—because they are so prone to excess; and because, not being in themselves directly and in every case sinful, they are ever prone to find excuses for their excess in their legitimacy. Many times have we found him adverting to the subject: Chaps. x. 12; xv. 18; xvii. 19; xxvi. 21. To these passages the reader is referred, and for the sentiment of the following verse, "A man's pride shall bring him low: but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit," to chaps. xv. 32; xviii. 12.

Verse 24. "Whoso is partner with a thief hateth his own soul: he heareth cursing, and bewrayeth it not." "*Hateth his own soul,*" means in this, as in other instances,—acts to the certain injury and ruin of his soul, as if he hated and desired evil to it: he is his own enemy,—in *fact*, if not in feeling.

The turpitude of theft, as a trespass against the principle and the express precept of the divine law, is here assumed. It requires no proof. The "*partner*" in any fraud is the man who, although not himself actually engaged in the direct perpetration of it, is privy to it, winks at it, secretly countenances it, and profits by it. He is as bad as the doer. He may screen his conscience under the pretext of his not doing the deed; but such a screen is a mere cobweb; it will not stand a breath. He may possibly be even worse. If he flatters himself that he is getting the profit without the sin, when he is coolly and deliberately allowing another to damn his own soul,—taking no concern about that, provided he get something by it,—he must indeed be under the power of a "strong delusion." The *receiver* and *resetter* is at least as guilty as the thief. I say *at least*; for in one obvious respect he is worse. His is a general trade, which gives encouragement to many thieves, by holding out to them the means of disposing of their stolen property and evading the law. He is thus, in fact, a partaker in the guilt of all. One thief cannot set up and maintain a resetter; but one resetter

may keep at their nefarious trade many thieves. Moreover, when the thief *swears falsely*,\* the partner is tempted to allow the perjury to pass undetected, lest he should expose himself as well as the thief; by which means he covers the guilt of another *doubly*—in the theft and in the perjury. Nay, if he were summoned as a witness, he is tempted to similar perjury himself, and so to bring additional guilt more directly upon his own soul, and draw down upon himself the wrath of God. Thus, every kind and degree of participation in evil, and connivance at its perpetration, is a snare to a man's soul. What, then, my brethren, is the general lesson? It is—"Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them." "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things," Phil. iv. 8.

Verse 25. "The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe." Here we have—1. A principle that leads to evil:—And 2. Another principle that counteracts and corrects it.

1. "*The fear of man bringeth a snare.*" The cases are so endlessly various in which this principle may be conceived to operate, that it is almost impossible to make a selection. I may notice a few. It "bringeth a snare" at the entrance on a religious life, there being few things that have in them a stronger withholding power than "the fear of man"—the dread of the contempt and scorn of the world, the alienation and desertion of friends, and the possible injury to prospects in life, thence arising. It "brings a snare" to believers themselves, when it tempts them to shrink from owning their Master, or from saying and doing what He commands

\* From the language here used, the Author seems to regard "*cursing*" in this sense as meaning *perjury*. Others understand it of "the *curse* pronounced (Lev. v. 1.) on him who *conceals a theft*." "His partner hears this curse;" he is brought under it, yet will not reveal the thief.

to be said or done ; or when it tempts them to concealment, to temporising, to evasion, to apostacy, to undue conformity to the world. It “bringeth a snare” when Christians are tempted to dissembling of their real sentiments, even by the fear of one another, when they happen to differ. It “bringeth a snare,” when ministers of the word, “stewards of the mysteries of God,” of whom it is required that they be “found faithful,” are tempted by the dread of offence, and censure and unpopularity, of the displeasure of individuals or of the multitude, to trim, to consult and conform to the likings and inclinations of their hearers,—to “shun to declare any part of the counsel of God”—or to “handle the word of God deceitfully,”—silencing their consciences, it may be, by pleading *prudence*, and blaming as deficient in this virtue such as are more faithful than themselves. It “bringeth a snare” to public men, in every department of civil life, when it tempts them from apprehension either of displeasing superiors or inferiors, to swerve from the straightforward course of truth, integrity, and justice, and the public good. The cases indeed, both more public and more private, in which this “*fear of man*” operates injuriously, are without number ; cases, in which we may be tempted by it to “do those things which we ought not to do,” and to “fail of doing those things which we ought to do.” It operates in great matters and in small ; in the highest and the lowest ranks of society, and in all between. It is ever suggesting the question—What will such a one think and say?—What will the world say?—instead of the one and only question which ought to determine every act and every word—*What will God say?* Our business is, to do our prescribed duty, and trust in Him ;—to fulfil the dictates of His will in every situation, steadily, immoveably, without flinching, uninfluenced alike by the smiles and the frowns of men,—“fearing God, and knowing no other fear.” This is safety, and this alone. “They that trust in the Lord shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever,” Psal. cxxv. 1. Even if a man’s firm fidelity should occasion him present evil, yet is he safe in the hands of his covenant God. Nothing shall ultimately injure him. O! had this trust in



God possessed its due power in the hearts and over the conduct of God's people, the impartiality of the sacred Record would not have had so many mournful cases to relate of deviations from the path of "simplicity and godly sincerity." It was "the fear of man" that tempted the father of the faithful, and after him his son Isaac, to similar and repeated prevarication and falsehood, in Egypt and in Gerar. It was "the fear of man," in "Aaron the priest of the Lord," that made the molten calf, even when the vision of the burning mount should have impressed the fear of God. It was "the fear of man" that stained the page of David's history with such deplorable instances of duplicity and dissembling. It was "the fear of man" that led Peter to deny Christ; and at a later period to dissemble so unworthily as to draw down upon him the censure of his fellow-apostle. It was "the fear of man" that made the friends and fellow-servants of Paul, when he was brought to trial before Nero, act with such dastardly unkindness, as to give him cause to say—"At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me." And to these might be added, many instances, from the sacred history, of the working of the same principle in characters where we are less surprised and mortified to find it; as in Saul, and Pilate, and others. Beware, then, of the fear of man, and cherish the fear of God!

Verse 26. "Many seek the ruler's favour; but every man's judgment cometh from the Lord." This may be considered as the opposite temptation. We have had the *fear* of man: here is his *favour*. The temptation designed is—the love of "the honour that cometh from men,"—the benefit to be expected from being in the good graces of those who have much in their power. In both cases, let us well remember the assurance:—"Every man's judgment cometh from the Lord." This may be understood as referring to the overruling providence of God. Every man shall have what God appoints to him. Men are in His hand. They are His instruments, whether for evil or for good. Our fears and our hopes are alike in His power,—to disappoint or to fulfil them.—Or it may mean that every man's *final judgment*

cometh from the Lord,—the fixture of his everlasting state. And surely there can be no motive more powerful than this to beware of being swayed by either the *favour* or the *fear* of man.

Verse 27. “An unjust man is an abomination to the just: and he that is upright in the way is abomination to the wicked.” Assuredly the feeling meant by the same form of expression in the two clauses of this verse, is *widely different*. In the one case, it is *the character alone* that is “abomination.” In the feelings of the just toward the unjust, there is nothing of the nature of personal hostility,—no wish of evil,—no pleasure in his sufferings. It is all the contrary. He pities, and he prays for him:—he does him good as he has opportunity: he would fondly seek and save him. It is otherwise with the unjust toward the just. The malignant hatred of their goodness provokes exasperation against their person. How illustrative of this remark is the contrast between the feelings of the murderers of Stephen and the feelings of their suffering victim!—of the persecutors and the persecuted!—the former “gnashing upon him with their teeth,” thirsting for and imbruing their hands in his blood:—the latter, with his dying breath, pleading, like his gracious Master, for their forgiveness! Their character was an abomination to the holy martyr; but not their persons. But *they* made no such distinction. They hated the principles and the character, and they hated and killed the man.

As that first martyr felt, so ought *we* to feel towards our fellow-sinners, how bitter soever may be their thoughts of us, or their feelings toward us. We own ourselves debtors to the mercy of God in Christ; and we cannot, we dare not, glory over even the worst of men. We may loathe their characters, but we pity and love themselves. We may hate the sin, but we hate not the sinner. The blessed God “hateth all the workers of iniquity.” He hates them *as* workers of iniquity. But in the midst of all His assurances of abhorrence while they go on in sin, He still expostulates and pleads with them in mercy.

You think God's commands are *hard*. No; it is "the way of transgressors that is hard." Where is the single command of God's, that does not bear upon it the impress of *goodness* as well as of holiness? What is the sum of all that He commands you to do, or commands you to abstain from? Does not the whole mean—"Forsake not thine own mercies:"—destroy not thyself:—consult thy first and best interests? Is not all He says to you said with the view of persuading you to escape from woe, and to embrace happiness?—What is His one command by the gospel—"that ye believe in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ," but a command to accept salvation, and to be blessed for ever? Obey it and live.

## LECTURE XCI.

Prov. xxx. 1—6.

“The words of Agur the son of Jakeh, even the prophecy: the man spake unto Ithiel, even unto Ithiel and Ucal, Surely I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man. I neither learned wisdom, nor have the knowledge of the holy. Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended? who hath gathered the wind in his fists? who hath bound the waters in a garment? who hath established all the ends of the earth? what is his name, and what is his son’s name, if thou canst tell? Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him. Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar.”

We have now finished what are properly the proverbs of Solomon; consisting, after the introductory part of the book,—of the proverbs selected by himself,—and those subsequently copied out from his larger collection by the men of God in the days of Hezekiah. What remains in the 30th and 31st chapters, may be regarded as a kind of *appendix* to the book; and in all probability was added by the same persons; no doubt under divine guidance.

The *first verse* may be considered as the title prefixed by them to this small portion of inspired truth, which they were thus directed to preserve from oblivion, and to insert in the canon of holy writ. It is a small portion, consisting of no more than this one chapter. And yet it is not smaller than the words of Obadiah in the Old Testament, or the Epistle of Jude in the New. The occasional sayings and the inspired prophecies of others besides AGUR are recorded in the histories of the Bible, although not assigned, any more than

his, a distinct and distinctly titled place in the Canon. The apostle Jude, in his epistle, short as it is, has redeemed from being forgotten and lost one of the earliest prophecies delivered in the history of our world,—the prophecy of “ΕΝΟΧ, the seventh from Adam.” Had the chapter before us been separated from the book of Proverbs, and placed alone, with the *Title* in the *first verse* prefixed to it, it would have borne resemblance in length to one of the small books referred to—“The Vision of Obadiah.”

Agur must have been well-known as a “*man of God* ;”—even although it may be doubted, as by some it has been, whether he belonged to the number of those who were called the “sons of the prophets,”—and who were trained in the seminaries called the “schools of the prophets.” The doubt has been founded on what he says of himself in the third verse—“I neither learned wisdom, nor have the knowledge of the holy ;” which has been interpreted as amounting to much the same thing with the words of Amos—“I am not a prophet, neither a prophet’s son.” How far this may be correct and conclusive, I will not pretend to say. We know nothing of Agur from Scripture history ; and but little of him here.

His “*words*” are called a “*prophecy*.” It is, in the Hebrew, the term which, in some passages,\* is translated “*burden*.” It occurs again in chap. xxxi. 1 :—and both there and here it means a *weighty and divinely dictated discourse or writing*. This portion, then, of the sayings of Agur,—of what he delivered in the form of inspired instructions, has thus been, in divine providence, preserved, and, with the sanction of other inspired men, assigned a place in the sacred Canon.

Some of the ancient fathers had a fancy that by Agur was meant Solomon himself. But this could have no foundation but the *place* in which the words are inserted ; which is but slender evidence. They probably got their place here, in consequence of the resemblance they bore to

\* *e. g.* Isa. xiii. 1 ; xv. 1, and Hab. i. 1.

the contents in general of the book to which they are appended.

“The man spake unto Ithiel, even unto Ithiel and Ucal.” Some translations have it—*touching*, or *concerning*, Ithiel and Ucal:—but it is much more likely that Ithiel and Ucal were two of Agur’s pupils.

Some have regarded the import of the names *Ithiel* and *Ucal*, of which the one signifies *God with me*, and the other *the Mighty* or *the Mighty one*,—not as names, but as expressing the nature of the prophecy or of its subject. But this seems a mere fancy,—both in itself, and in any attempt to make out the appropriateness of the terms as descriptive of the lessons contained in the chapter. Almost all Hebrew names were significant: and the common opinion, as in many other cases, we take to be the true one,—that Ithiel and Ucal, as already mentioned, were two of Agur’s disciples; to whom he addressed his instructions, very probably in answer to inquiries from them. Only make the supposition (not in itself surely an improbable one) that they had put to him some questions on topics of a mysterious nature,—topics surpassing the apprehension of the human intellect, and on which God had not been pleased to make any discoveries,—some of the “deep things of God,”—the “secret things which belong unto the Lord:”—make, I say, the supposition; and it imparts a propriety and emphasis to his words—those especially with which he commences, peculiarly striking:—

Verses 2, 3. “Surely I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man. I neither learned wisdom, nor have the knowledge of the holy.”—This language, observe, is not the language of another about Agur;

\* Stuart, supported by several other able critics, gives a widely different rendering of the first verse from that of our English translation:—“*The words of Agur, the son of her who was obeyed in Massa. Thus spake the man: I have toiled for God; I have toiled for God, and have ceased.*” This rendering does not involve “the change or omission” of even “a single consonant” of the Hebrew text, but only an alteration of the Masoretic vowel points. If the reasons assigned for it may not be regarded as *conclusive*, they seem at least to establish a strong probability in its favour. Stuart’s long and elaborate note is worthy of perusal by those interested in such a critical question.

but his own words about himself: and we should be about as near the truth were we to regard him as a man destitute of ordinary understanding, and little if at all above the level of the brutes, because he speaks thus of himself, as if we were to regard the Apostle of the Gentiles as hardly having about him as much of the character of a child of God as to admit of his being looked upon as one, because he calls himself “less than the least of all saints.” In both cases we have the language of strong feeling—the feeling of deep personal abasement and conscious deficiency. And such language is never measured and precise; it is always very strong,—always in hyperbole. Imagine Agur bringing the powers of his mind to the trial, on some subject of mysterious depth or sublime and incomprehensible vastness; feeling his incompetency to fathom or to grasp it; sinking under the weight of the difficulty, and the consciousness of his ignorance and weakness, when his intellect was put to such a test;—his breaking out, in terms of extravagance in expressing the feeling with which he was burdened, is in perfect harmony with *nature*. As Asaph, when, recovering from his temptation, and made sensible of its extreme foolishness, exclaims—“I was *as a beast* before thee!”—so Agur, feeling the subjects under his consideration utterly above and beyond him, seems to himself as if he had no understanding at all: and indeed it is neither impossible nor improbable, that, in the humility of his spirit, he might think his ignorance and incompetency to be owing, in part, to his deficiency in spirituality of mind, and in becoming elevation of thought and of aspiration after God;—sensible as he must have been then, as we all are now, how much views of divine things are often obscured, and rising affections and earnest aspirings after THE GREAT and THE GOOD,—after the knowledge of God and of heavenly and eternal realities,—are kept down by the influence of the flesh and the world.

It is not unlikely that Ithiel and Ucal had shown a propensity to pry into the secrets of God,—to desire discoveries which God had not been pleased to make,—and to urge their desire with a vehemence and importunity, which, however

natural, went beyond what was becoming. Their teacher sets them an example,—an example of the humbleness of mind which belongs to creatures of limited faculties, and dependence on God for the knowledge of what was beyond their own penetration. He expresses himself strongly, in order to impress their minds the more deeply. And the more they had been accustomed to look up to him as their superior, with admiration and confidence, the more would they be surprised and struck by the force of his expressions of almost *self-annihilation*, in regard to the subjects of their inquiries,—respecting which he might have seen them (as is too often the case with those whom experience has not yet shown the limits of their faculties, and the humility which the lesson inspires) too self-sufficient, and hard to satisfy with anything short of the wished-for information. Agur had become duly sensible how little it was that he possessed of wisdom and knowledge,—especially in what regarded the highest of all the fields of human investigation,—the being, the attributes, the counsels, the ways, of the Most High and the Most Holy.

In the third verse, "*the Holy*" is in the original a plural word—*the Holies*, or *the Holy Ones*. It is the same as in chap. ix. 10. The comparison of the two passages shows clearly that it is a designation of Deity:—and the *plural nouns* which are thus, in different ways and in different instances, used in regard to Jehovah, are justly regarded as having a reference in them to the *personal distinction in the unity of the Godhead*. And what if the nature of Deity, in this and in other respects, was one of the very subjects of the inquisitive speculation of these disciples of Agur?

It is as if he had said to them:—"You ascribe wisdom and knowledge to your instructor:—you look up to him for information, and for the solution of your difficulties, the unravelling of your perplexities, the clearing of your darkness. But you expect a great deal more from him than he is able to communicate. I have thought of your questions; I have exhausted the powers of my mind upon them; and, whatever may be the effect of the avowal upon you,—how



much soever it may possibly let down your teacher in your eyes,—the avowal must be made of my ignorance and incompetency,—with a sense of which, deeper than ever, the consideration of them has overwhelmed me!” Then, to check their presumption,—to impress them with the reasonableness of being, on some subjects, satisfied in ignorance,—subjects manifestly beyond man’s unassisted powers, and beyond the boundary which divine revelation has prescribed for itself,—subjects which God has not explained, and of which, perhaps, no explanation that could be given would be intelligible to the mental capacities of man,—subjects relative to “the high and lofty One who inhabiteth eternity” —who “dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto”—“whom no man hath seen or can see,”—and whose “ways are high above out of our sight”—he adds:—

Verse 4. “Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended? who hath gathered the wind in his fists? who hath bound the waters in a garment? who hath established all the ends of the earth? what is his name, and what is his son’s name, if thou canst tell?”—Of these striking words the general spirit appears to me to be the same with that of Job xi. 7—9, 12; the subject of which is the incomprehensibility of God. We cannot scale the height, we cannot fathom the depth, we cannot reach the length, we cannot embrace the width, of the vast, the illimitable subject. Such is the lesson of these words now before us:—“*Who hath ascended up into heaven?*”—that is, to see the glories of the INVISIBLE,—to learn the secrets of the world unknown,—to read the books of providence, and grace, and judgment? And who hath “*descended?*”—that is, to bring down and to communicate the discoveries He has made? No man has mounted to the third heavens, and explored their hidden wonders,—and received a commission to carry back the revelation of what he has seen and heard to the sons of men—the children of earth. If such a man there be, “What is his name, and what is his son’s name, if thou canst tell?”—who and where is he?—and who and where are they that have the privilege and the honour of connexion with him?

What is his name? Is he on earth? Or, if he himself has gone the way of all living, what is his son's name? Point out the descendants of the man whom God has thus supremely distinguished. This is neither more nor less than a challenge to find and to name one, either now existing, or in all preceding ages, who has had an intuitive and perfect acquaintance with the mysteries of God's being, and the secrets of God's mind:—and it implies a strong admonition to humble-mindedness,—to beware of presumption,—to be satisfied with the amount of divine communications. Something further than this, indeed, there is. The language clearly conveys the sentiment, that no one but a being who himself possesses the perfections, and exercises the powers, and performs the works of God, can be capable of comprehending God. This seems the intended import of the questions—“Who hath gathered the wind in his fists? who hath bound the waters in a garment? who hath established all the ends of the earth?” Find me out the man who has done, or who can do, these things; and I will show you the man who is competent to answer your questions,—to penetrate the depths of God, and to give you full satisfaction. One thing indeed might still be wanting. They might themselves require to have the same capacities and powers with the man who made the communications, in order to their being able to comprehend them. The plain import is—*He who has done, and continues to do, these things, is God himself;—and by God himself alone can God be comprehended.*

By some commentators these words have been understood as containing “a prophetic intimation of Him who came down from heaven to be our instructor and Saviour, and then ascended into heaven to be our advocate; who, as one with the Father, created and upholds all things; who was known in some measure to the ancient church as Jehovah, *I AM*, and the only-begotten Son of God; and from whom alone the knowledge of God can be obtained. The name of the great Creator, as manifested through his Son, appears to be inquired after; and who is that wise and happy man who has obtained this knowledge?”

While it ought ever to be interesting to the believer's mind to find his Lord in every passage of the Bible that will justly bear to be interpreted of Him, yet, most assuredly, the true way to honour the divine Author of the Bible, as I have had more than once occasion to observe, is—to endeavour to discover, in all cases, the precise meaning of every portion of it,—to find what was the design of the Holy Spirit,—what *the lesson* which was intended by Him to be conveyed. This should, in every case, be our *sole* and earnest aim.

Now the view of this passage which has just been mentioned I cannot regard as at all the true one, for the following reasons:—

*First*, The form of question here implies the idea of *difficulty* or *impossibility* to tell either the name of him who hath “gathered the winds in his fists, or bound the waters in a garment, or established all the ends of the earth,”—or “the name of his son.” Now, considering the question as relating to the actual Creator and Governor of the physical universe and the elements and powers of nature, there could exist *no difficulty* to tell *who did* the things specified,—to tell the name of the almighty Maker and Superintendent of all things.

*Secondly*, The question, “What is his name, or what is his son's name?” applies, you observe, to the same person of whom it is also asked, “Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended?” Now, if this be supposed to refer to Jesus, the future Immanuel, then what are we to make of the additional question, “*What is his son's name?*” And the question, “Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended?” cannot apply (nor is it at all pretended that it does) to the Father. Then—

*Thirdly*, According to the terms of the exposition quoted, that there is a prophetic reference to Him who came down from heaven to be our Instructor and Saviour, and then ascended to heaven to be our Advocate—the questions in the passage ought to be inverted in their order, and should have stood—“Who hath *descended* from heaven, and *ascended?*”

In the order in which they stand, they do not seem susceptible of any other sense than that which we have put upon them:—namely this, “Where is the man,—where are there any traces of his existence? where is his son, that we may find his genealogy?” “You make your inquiries at me, (as if Agur had said,) but have *I* gathered the wind in my fists? have *I* bound up the waters in a garment? have *I* established the ends of the earth? And before you can obtain satisfactory information, you must find the man who has done all this.”

While I say these things in regard to the immediate and proper sense of the passage, I am far from denying—I rejoice in believing—that what is said in it is, in the fullest amount of its meaning, true respecting Jesus of Nazareth—“God manifest in the flesh.” Yet even now, when we have obtained, and happily enjoy, the full and clear revelation of the mind and will of Jehovah;—in this gospel age, when “the darkness is past, and the true light shineth”—when, though “no man hath seen God at any time, the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, hath declared him,”—when “God, who at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake unto the fathers by the prophets, hath spoken unto us by his Son:”—even now, are there no questions of perplexing difficulty to be asked?—is everything that was before mysterious respecting God and the ways of God, now plain and easily comprehensible? No, verily. Many are the inquiries which may yet be put, which the revelation of God has not answered:—and even of what revelation *has* made known, many are the explanations which may be desired and sought, which He has not seen meet to give. *Still* we stand in need of lessons of humility; lessons of self-diffidence; lessons of gratitude for what *has* been made known to us, and of patient and submissive acquiescence in that measure of knowledge, without prying into what God has seen meet to withhold and to keep among the “secret things which belong to Himself.” It is ours to “receive with meekness” what God has taught us, and not to attempt making additions to His lessons,—“intruding into those

things which we have not seen, vainly puffed up by our fleshly minds." It is well, brethren, to have our minds fully disciplined to this. And this, accordingly, is the lesson pressed by Agur on each of his disciples, and through them upon us.

Verse 5. "Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him." "Every word of God *is pure.*" Yes: how can it be otherwise? If it be asked respecting man, "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?" so may it be asked respecting God, "What but what is pure can come from untainted purity?" The same character is everywhere given of God's word.\* It "is pure," as being *truth* without any mixture of error. It "is pure," as being perfectly free of all *deceitful purpose*—all its promises faithful. It "is pure," as having in every part of it a *holy influence*. It "is pure" in its *own nature*, like the God whose word it is; and "pure" in *all the effects* which arise from it,—the characters which the faith of it produces being counterparts to itself,—God's word making those who receive it like Himself.

There is, perhaps, in the expression here a more immediate reference to the *unmingled truth* of God's word. This suits the connexion with what follows:—"He is a *shield* unto them that put their trust in him." *Scepticism* and *infidelity* unsettle the mind. They leave it without confidence and without security. The mind under their influence is like a vessel that has drifted from its moorings, and has been left to drive out to sea, without rudder and without anchor,—unmanned, and at the mercy of the winds and waves and currents:—or, to keep nearer to the allusion in the verse under comment, it is like a soldier in the thick and peril of the battle *without a shield*, in danger from every arrow that flies, and every sword that is raised against him. They make their unhappy subject the sport and the victim of every delusive theory and every temptation of Satan. Hence such expressions as that of Paul to the Ephesians:—

\* Psalm xii. 6; xviii. 30; cx'x. 140: Rom. vii. 12.

“Over all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.” God is the “SHIELD” of all who trust in Him. And it is the *trust*,—it is the firm *faith in God*,—that imparts the feeling of security. So, what is here said of God himself is said of His *truth* or *faithfulness*:—“His *truth* shall be thy *shield* and *buckler*.” God could not be “a shield,” though His power be almighty, unless He were *faithful*. It is His *faithfulness* that renders Him the object of *trust*. And when this view of God’s *faithfulness* is such as to impart *perfect trust*—the spirit, calm and tranquil, feels as if it were under the protection of an all-covering shield.\*

The *sixth* verse contains a most solemn and important caution:—“Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar.” We take the word of God as we have received it. What Paul says of the books of the *Old Testament*, which formed the Jewish canon in his day, may be applied to the whole Bible—“All scripture is given by inspiration of God.” We have the surest ground for believing that the books of both Testaments have all on sufficient authority had their place assigned them in the sacred canon. The very circumstance of some of them having been disputed, only shows the jealousy with which the claims of each were scrutinized ere they were admitted. And to the word of God in general, as well as to the book of prophecy in which they immediately occur, may we truly apply the language—language expressing only more fully and pointedly still the lesson of this verse—“I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book,” Rev. xxii. 18, 19.

Of inspired men it was the sacred duty to deliver the

\* The figure is frequent:—Gen. xv. 1; Psalm lxxxiv. 11; xci. 2, &c.

word of the Lord exactly as it was communicated to them, —without addition, deduction, or alteration. The charge of God was—“The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord,” Jer. xxiii. 28. The maxim of the true prophets under the old dispensation was—“As the Lord liveth, what the Lord saith unto me, *that* will I speak.” And what Micaiah and others exemplified faithfully under the old economy, Paul and his associates in the ministry exemplified under the new: —“For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ.” “Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; but have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God,” 2 Cor. ii. 17; iv. 1, 2.

*Our* duty, my brethren, is clear. It is to KEEP BY THE INSPIRED RECORD; to keep by it sacredly, implicitly, with a holy jealousy for its supreme, sole, and universal authority. As Protestants, we disown all human infallibility;—the authority of all traditions,—of all the *dicta* of the Fathers,—of all the decrees of councils, whether provincial or œcumenical. Our motto is—“THE BIBLE, AND THE BIBLE ALONE, IS THE RELIGION OF PROTESTANTS.” Let us see that we firmly cling to our motto, and that we consistently and uniformly act upon it. It is not merely when, like some enthusiasts, we pretend to receive, ourselves, communications from the Spirit of God of equal authority with his written word, or when we rely upon such communications as are received by others,—that we are chargeable with the guilt of “adding to his words.” There are other grounds on which this charge may be found to lie against us. We are thus guilty, when we make any part of the written word itself express a sentiment different from, or even beyond, that which God, by the Holy Spirit, intended it to convey. Our exclusive inquiry should be—What did the divine Author of the Bible mean by this sentence, by

this section, or even by this expression? When we have ascertained and expounded the meaning, we may then take it up as a subject for more enlarged illustration and proof from other parts of Scripture; ever bearing in mind that while we are doing so, each portion of the word that is adduced for illustration or evidence be treated precisely on the same principle,—no one of them being ever used beyond its proper amount of meaning.

The same principle should make critics very cautious in applying the principle of *conjectural emendation*—altering words so as to express what they *think* must have been the sense of the writer. This is extremely hazardous. There is a strong temptation to introduce the application of the principle, when by the alteration the passage is made to speak a language that accords with their preconceived opinions. And commentators and paraphrasts should be on their guard, what phrases they use as synonymous with those of the writer on whom they are commenting,—and equally upon their guard in the use of *supplements*, for the making out and the clearer expression of the sense. Moreover, in every case in which it can be made clearly to appear, that any word, or phrase, or sentence, has been, under whatever circumstances, foisted into the text in after times, and that it formed no part of the original writing,—the same principle imperatively requires, that we do not employ that word, or phrase, or sentence, or paragraph, as possessing the authority of God;—and if it be of doubtful authenticity, the doubt must in justice be carried forward to the inference we draw, and the conclusion to which we are led by it. We ought to regard nothing as more fearful, and more anxiously to be shunned, than making the God of truth affirm what he did not mean to affirm, or deny what he did not mean to deny: and so, in effect, to put the seal of heaven to a forgery of our own. And on all points which are of a mysterious character, it becomes us to be very diffident and cautious:—where the simple fact is stated, and no explanation given, we must beware of attaching to our own explanations the authority of the word of God. By attempting to unfold the *mode* of the fact, where the *fact*



*alone* is stated, we are in danger of “adding to God’s word,” and of being “found liars,” and exposed to His just reproof and punishment.

My brethren—if ever there was a time when a more than ordinary strictness of attention to the principle in this verse was demanded—it is the time in which we live. Let us see that we not only in words assert and maintain it, but in all our practice conscientiously and scrupulously exemplify it,—and press the example on the universal and undeviating imitation of our fellow-christians. Let Christians seek more, at the same time, of a deep and humble sense of their own ignorance, and of their natural perverseness; their inaptitude and slowness to learn the lessons of divine wisdom,—their proneness to spiritual pride,—to the independence of thinking for themselves, and of interpreting God’s lessons in a sense of their own,—to being dissatisfied with the measure of divine communications, and adding thereto presumptuously human speculations and inventions. Let us learn, in the humble and docile spirit of children, to sit at the feet of our gracious Instructor,—thankful for all that He gives us to know, and never allowing what we *do* know to be unsettled in our minds by what we *do not* know. Let us neither make the God of truth a liar by disbelieving aught that He testifies, nor expose ourselves to His reproof as liars by presuming to add to His words what He has *not* testified. The prayer which becomes us is that of the psalmist—“Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.”—“Shew me thy ways, O Lord; teach me thy paths. Lead me in thy truth, and teach me: for thou art the God of my salvation; on thee do I wait all the day.”

And let not any be startled at finding in the word of God statements which are above their apprehension. If there are mysteries in the *works* of God,—should we not expect to find them in His *word*?—if in nature, why not in revelation?—if in all that God has *done*, how much more in GOD HIMSELF?—There is not a single department of His works of which the investigation does not bring us to a stand,—to points beyond which we are unable to penetrate. Were everything

in that part of the divine administration which His word unfolds perfectly level to every capacity, so as to suggest no questions of perplexity, and to give no occasion for the exclamation—"Such knowledge is too wonderful for me!"—there would be an incongruity between His word and His works. And when we are lost among the works of God, in every direction in which we can explore them, how specially unreasonable to suppose that in the *divine nature itself* there should be nothing transcending our comprehension;—that we should be competent to search out God, when we are unable to search out any one of His works!—that we should be able to comprehend the mode of His subsistence, when we are unable to understand our own,—unable to answer the question *What is life?*—unable to explain the connection between the soul and the body—their mutual influence upon each other, and the power which, on the formation of any volition, sets the energies of the physical frame to work for its accomplishment. Let all, then, be diffident and humble in regard to divine communications; and beware of that spirit of lofty and independent speculation which makes light of all that it is required to receive on dictation. Let the evidences of revelation, by all means, be studied and investigated; and when the Bible has had its claims to divine authority satisfactorily established, let the sole question be,—*What saith the Scripture?* The design of revelation is infinitely gracious—"to show unto men the way of salvation." That is its own peculiar lesson. If *that* is missed, all is missed that is worth finding:—for what is all else besides, if it leaves you WITHOUT SALVATION?

## LECTURE XCII.

—◆—  
PROV. xxx. 7—12.

“Two things have I required of thee; deny me them not before I die: remove far from me vanity and lies; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain. Accuse not a servant unto his master, lest he curse thee, and thou be found guilty. There is a generation that curseth their father, and doth not bless their mother. There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness.”

IN the first of these verses there is no form of address; but there can be no doubt that we are to regard the words as a *prayer to God*:—to God as the God of *providence*—the supreme Disposer of all events,—that He would order everything, in sovereign wisdom, agreeably to the spirit and design of the suppliant’s prayer; and to God as the God of *grace*—that in whatever situation He might be pleased, in His providence, to place him, He would furnish him with all the supplies of divine influence required to keep him from evil.

When, with regard to the different petitions of the prayer, Agur says, “Deny me them not *before I die*,” his words are, obviously, not to be understood as meaning that he would be satisfied if, at any time before he closed his earthly life, the things he asks for were granted. The petitions are not of a description to admit of any such interpretation. He could never consider it enough that “vanity and lies should be removed from him” ere he died, though they should continue with him till the latest stage of his course; or that he

should only learn contentment before he took his final leave of the world. The words properly signify—"until I die;" that is, grant me them from this time forward to the end of my life, till I shall "go the way of all the earth."

His *first* petition is—"Remove far from me vanity and lies." What may we regard as included under "*vanity and lies?*" First, *all idolatry*. This is often, in Scripture, alluded to under such designations as "*vanity,*" "*falsehood,*" "*a thing of nought:*" and I cannot doubt it was in Agur's mind. In this view, what he asks is, that his heart might be "right with God, and steadfast in His covenant,"—that his affections and desires might be supremely and solely to God, and that Him only he might serve.—Secondly, *all error in sentiment*;—that he might be so enlightened from above, as to embrace no false views, but might clearly understand divine truth, as revealed in the divine word, and might under a becomingly deep impression of the authority and sacredness of that word, cleave to it in its simplicity and purity, with full purpose of heart, unto the end:—Thirdly, *the folly and deceitfulness of sin*;—that he might not be the foolish dupe of temptation to those indulgences in evil by which many, in the vanity and infatuation of their minds, cheated themselves of their best blessings, and forfeited the final and eternal inheritance; that he might not hearken to the lying promises of Satan, and, at the expense of such a forfeiture, follow "the pleasures of sin which are but for a season:"—Fourthly, *the thinking, inventing, and uttering of falsehood*;—that he might ever keep his heart, as under the eye of Him who "desireth truth in the inward parts;" and that he might ever "speak the truth as he thought it in his heart," putting away all lying, deception, and folly from his lips, and practising all that was "true, and pure, and honest, and lovely, and of good report:"—and lastly, *having, or expecting foolishly and self-delusively, to find, his portion in this life*,—that he might not be of those who were the victims of the world's delusions, vainly pleasing themselves with that "fashion of the world which passeth away."

And this naturally leads me to the *threefold* prayer which

follows. The prayer, let it first be observed, is a very extraordinary one. In the *first* of its petitions, indeed,—“Give me not *poverty*”—who is there that will *not* join? What man of the world, if he thought he should be heard and answered, would not, with his whole heart, say—Give me not *poverty*?—the great object of the world’s deprecation and dread!—But ah! on what different grounds from Agur’s would the petition be presented!—for *this* must be specially remarked—that it is not on account of *anything in the situations themselves*, considered in a temporal respect, that this good man deprecates either the poverty on the one hand or the riches on the other. It is not on account of the difficulties, privations, and hardships of the one, nor is it on account of the cares, and risks, and anxious encumbrances of the other. It is solely on account of the *temptations to sin*—the *hazard to the religious principle*—involved in them. Here, the world cannot go along with him. But all the true children of God will. They will, like Agur, regard every situation and every want in life, as it bears upon and affects their highest and best interests—their relations to the unseen world and to eternity. Look then at the petitions as they lie before us, in this light. We take them in the *order of the reasons assigned*.

2. “Give me not *riches*—lest I be full and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord?” The gifts of God’s kind providence *ought* to draw the grateful hearts of those who receive them to himself as the Giver: and it is truly affecting to think that they should work on our hearts in the very opposite way to that which is reasonable and right, and in the best sense of the word, *natural*—in agreement with the true and eternal nature of things:—that the gifts should so often usurp the Giver’s place, the place in the affections and desires which should be occupied by Himself. This is one of the strong and melancholy indications of our depravity; that the more we enjoy of God’s goodness, the more prone are we to forget Him; the more we *get*, the more apt to *forget*. What should we think of such treatment of *us*? and yet such is *our* treatment of God. It has been in all ages the

manifested character of our fallen race. It is under the influence of this sad tendency, that the man of wealth “denies God and says, *Who is the Lord?*” This is quite similar to the description of the same character by Asaph:—“They speak loftily: they set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth.”—“Who is the Lord?”—that is, that I should seek Him, or serve Him. Agur had seen this exemplified, and he was afraid of himself;—afraid lest he should imbibe the same spirit of lofty independence and high-mindedness,—as if he were superior to the obligations of religion, and could do well enough without God.

Such, then, is the danger of “*being full*,”—of the ample enjoyment and free use of the wealth of the world,—to engender and cherish the spirit that “*denies God*,”—that owns not His providence,—that disdains the restraints of His authority,—and that defies His threatenings, and spurns His grace; that says—“Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.”—Agur did not consider himself as superior to the influences by which the principles of others had been shaken and overcome, or to the dangers before which others had fallen. He knew human nature better; he knew *his own heart* better. “Blessed is the man that feareth always!”

3. We have a petition, in the same spirit of self-jealousy, against *poverty*:—“Give me not poverty—lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.”—His apprehensions were the same in kind as before. He feared lest, when feeling the hardships of a state of penury, not to himself alone, but still more to his family, to those nearest and dearest to his heart, he should be tempted to fraud and theft,—that is, to any dishonest practices, for the supplying of his own and their wants,—to any thing inconsistent with the high principles of integrity and honour by which the people of God should be distinguished. And associated with this is the temptation to *impiety*—“and take the name of my God in vain.” This may mean, that he might be tempted, having committed the theft, to conceal it by false swearing—to *perjure* himself, and so try to cover one sin by the com-

mission of another; as it is not the first nor the thousandth time that lies have been told, and confirmed by spontaneous or exacted oaths, to prevent the detection of theft. Or it may refer, more generally, to the temptation to use "the name of God" in fretful and impious murmurings; in uttering hard things, in the spirit of angry discontent, against Him. This the poor are too often ready to do. Even the pious poor may, by great and long-continued privation and suffering, have their patience worn out,—become "envious at the foolish, when they see the prosperity of the wicked,"—be tempted to say, "How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the Most High?"—and thus step by step, to arrive at "cursing and bitterness," and "taking the name of Jehovah in vain." This process was what Agur feared, in regard to himself. He dreaded the evil influence of *this* extreme, as well as of the other.

It is not, perhaps, correct to say, that the desire which Agur expresses, was for a *moderate competency* of worldly good. That he was impressed strongly with the dangers of the extremes is clear; and with the conviction that in the intermediate position the temptations were fewest and least,—as without question they are. But, in the spirit of humble self-diffidence, he would have been afraid to fix any thing in his mind as that which he exclusively desired:—he would have shrunk from determining, had the determination been put in his power. He *leaves all to the judgment and appointment of God himself*.

4. Such is clearly the spirit of the words, "Feed me with food convenient for me."—The phrase "*convenient for me*," or "*suitable to me*," evidently signifies *consistent with my truest interests*—the interests of my spiritual state and my everlasting destiny. It would be a very low interpretation of the words, to suppose them to mean no more than what God knew on the whole would be most conducive to his temporal comfort and enjoyment. The interpretation, moreover, would not be at all in harmony with the reasons assigned for the preceding petitions. It would set this fourth request, in the spirit of it, wholly out of keeping with the others,

He says in effect, "Place me, my God, in the condition which THOU—knowing fully as Thou dost my character, and the tendencies of my nature—seest to be *best for me*—best for me, as regards my highest welfare—the welfare of my soul and my prospects for eternity—that I receive damage in nothing by the snares and temptations of this present evil world."—The lesson is one,—and few lessons can be more important,—of perfect, unreserved acquiescence in divine appointments; along with the supremely earnest desire that all may be directed and overruled in such a manner as most effectually to secure from injury, and to advance in growth, the principles of the spiritual life in our souls, and to ensure our final attainment of heavenly glory,—of the "unsearchable riches of Christ." And where is the man deserving the name of Christian who would hesitate about choosing poverty in preference to riches,—the lowest abasement to the very highest elevation of worldly condition,—were he assured that the riches and the honours must be enjoyed at the expense of his soul's good, at the risk, and more than risk, of his spiritual interests, and of his being despoiled of the "better and more enduring substance,"—the "treasure in the heavens which fadeth not?"

Verse 10. "Accuse not a servant unto his master, lest he curse thee, and thou be found guilty."—"Accuse not"—literally, "*Hurt not with thy tongue*,"—that "unruly member" by which so immense an amount of mischief, private and public, has ever been wrought.

No general counsel, or maxim of duty, is without exceptions. It is obvious that there are cases in which *to accuse* may be an important and imperative duty. When a master is known by us to be wronged, his property plundered by secret embezzlement, or other evils perpetrated affecting his interests or his reputation, without his privacy. In such cases, it becomes much more than allowable, it becomes incumbent,—a sacred duty, on the principle of the "royal law," to give information. But—

1. There are included in the prohibition slander, and false accusation.—Every thing of this kind is, in *all* cases,



bad; but its turpitude is specially aggravated, when the subject of the slander is an inferior, and the charge against him to his superior, on whom he depends, and whose good opinion is of such essential consequence to him: and on this principle, if aggravated in the case of a servant, still more so is it in that of a *slave*,—the situation of such a one being sufficiently oppressed and wretched *in itself*. It is, then, “helping forward the affliction,” which humanity should ever seek to alleviate.

2. It implies that we should not be *forward* and *officious* in accusing; eager to do it, needlessly; doing it,—when no good end is to be answered by it; or for trivial causes; or on grounds that are not clearly ascertained, but are uncertain and dubious. It should be remembered, how serious a matter it is to introduce an unfounded jealousy between a master and his servant,—serious especially to the latter, being a deep injury to the poor man’s reputation, interest, present happiness, and future prospects; his all, in every view, as regards this world, depending upon his character.

3. The disposition which we ought rather to cherish, in this as in every case, is the disposition to excuse and to palliate, as far as truth will permit, rather than to criminate and blacken. A more unamiable feature there can hardly be in the character of any one, than a proneness to watch for and to report faults;—a malicious satisfaction in destroying a master’s confidence in a servant,—and in this way, it may be, avenging himself of the inferior for some neglect or impropriety in his conduct towards him. This is mean, pitiful, and vile.

The motive urged is, “*Lest he curse thee, and thou be found guilty.*” The spirit of this consideration is the same as in some other cases mentioned in the Mosaic law.\* I understand the words in the verse before us in a similar sense to that expressed in these passages. The *curse* of the servant may not be itself in a right spirit, or in a justifiable form of words:—yet if there is substantial ground for it,—if wrong

\* See Exod. xxii. 22—24; Deut. xv. 7—9; xxiv. 14, 15.

is done,—if the inferior, of whom Jehovah is the graciously pledged protector, is really and seriously injured,—if the accuser is thus “found guilty” in the sight of God, *He* will prove himself the friend of the oppressed, and will vindicate his cause, and avenge the wrong.

In the following verses Agur may be considered as warning his disciples,—and now warning us, against the characters described by him.

In Scripture, the word “*generations*” is repeatedly used to signify particular *classes* or *descriptions* of men; for two reasons, or points of analogy:—*first*, that as generation follows generation, so surely, in every generation, a *succession* of such characters is to be found;—and *secondly*, that they very often communicate the character to one another, and thus keep up their respective kinds,—are successive propagators of their species.

Beginning with the earliest earthly relation, we have brought before us first the generation of unnatural, ungrateful children—the “generation that curseth their father and doth not bless their mother.” Parents ought to be blessed of their children, not cursed. They should be the objects of sincere attachment, self-denying obedience, and kind attention. For their sakes life itself should be ready to be risked and sacrificed. Children, from a proud, self-willed, stubborn spirit, may dislike discipline, restraint, and rebuke:—they may thus long for *freedom*, as they think and call it,—long to be their own masters, and to have their own way:—they may spurn at the rod, and fret and revile and “curse” their parents. Or, from the spirit of covetousness, and eagerness to obtain possession of their substance, they may wish *them* dead, and secretly, in their hearts, if not with their lips, “curse” them for living so long, and wish them out of the way, and have no tears for them when they are gone, or only the tears of feigned and hypocritical sorrow. Alas! it is to be feared that such cases were not mere suppositions in the days of Solomon; and that neither are they in our own. If you imagine the cases beyond nature,—then let me remind my young friends, that there

may be *various degrees* of the same description of evil. Young persons may belong to the generation in this verse, who, if they do not positively “*curse*,” yet, negatively, “*do not bless*.” Under both forms of expression Solomon conveys the same generic description of character: and although, on the principle of parallelism, the two clauses of the verse may be regarded as much alike, yet even that does not require perfect *sameness*, but only *similarity*—admitting, and indeed generally exemplifying, some shade of difference. “*Not blessing*” is only thus an inferior measure of the same unnatural spirit that “*curses*.” It implies the destitution, in feeling and in conduct, of the affection and gratitude which the relation requires. Do any of *you*, my young hearers, belong to this description of character?—this “generation” of unnatural children?—May God forbid! It is a very infamous and detestable character. It is ominous of all else that is evil. I am a father. But I trust I do not speak as a father only, but as a son too, whose memory blesses the departed objects of filial love, when I say that with nothing that concerns me would I trust the youth or the man that “curses his father and blesses not his mother.” There is nothing that is good there; no principle on which to depend. It is well that men have agreed to execrate conduct so unnatural. I must remind you, however, that there are some feelings, of which the absence is deeply shocking, while their possession is hardly to be recognised as among the moral virtues, they have in them so much of mere *instinct*, and are common to men with the brutes. To constitute natural affection a virtue, it must be cultivated and exercised under the influence of a higher principle. Parents must be loved, obeyed, and blessed,—*because such is the will of God*. Parents stand next to God in the claim which His law makes on the love of the heart:—“Honour thy father and mother, that it may be well with thee:”—“Children, obey your parents in the Lord; for this is right.”

Verse 12. “There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness.” This is the generation—a very numerous one in every age—of *self-deceivers*. The “*filthiness*” here spoken of is the moral

pollution of fallen and sinful humanity; of which the word of the holy God gives so sad and so true an account. It is in the very nature of this depravity to be insensible to its own existence, or at least to its own degree. Sensibility to its true extent implies the operation of a new principle, the principle of a new spiritual nature. It is no matter of wonder, then, that depraved creatures should be found thinking well of themselves. There are some who have little consciousness of evil in them at all. And the reason is plain. They look at human laws and human theories of morals, and the conventional but godless morality of the world, and the prevailing sentiments about good and evil, virtue and vice, among men like themselves, whose moral sentiments are deadened by sin like their own. They come not at once to the only true test—that spiritual law, holy, just, and good, which begins and ends with supreme love to God, as its first requirement, and its pervading and summary principle; from which alone any one act of right and acceptable obedience can proceed. No soul is "*washed from its filthiness,*" till it is delivered from the elementary principle of all moral pollution—*enmity against God*. There is no true moral cleansing that does not begin with this. There are *two things* the propensity to which has ever been strong, since man became a fallen creature:—One is, to *separate morality from religion*, and to imagine that there may be no religion, and yet good enough morality; whereas the divine summary of the moral law consists of two precepts, of which the first relates to *God*, and the second to *men*. And it would be just as reasonable to say that the first may be obeyed without the second as to say that the second may be obeyed without the first,—as reasonable to say that a man may be religious without being moral, as to say that a man may be moral without being religious. The two tables of the law are only the higher and the lower departments of one moral code; and the same principles that produce conformity to the one will produce conformity to the other. And where the first principle of all is wanting, there can be true conformity to none. This source of self-deception is most extensively and

ruinously prevalent. The other to which I referred is—the *externalizing of religion itself*. The love and fear of God, springing from faith in Him as revealed to sinners in the Gospel, is the religion of the Bible. But the religion to which men have ever been prone is a religion of outward observance,—of rites and ceremonies, of bodily presence, and posture, and utterance, and act:—a system that lulls the conscience in security by deadening it to the demands of all that is spiritual and holy in the affections and desires of the heart, and all that is truly godly in the life. What an exemplification of this propensity among the Jews, when they were persuading themselves that they were the chosen people and the favourites of Heaven, at the very time that they were “walking after their own lusts”—“having no fear of God before their eyes,”—breaking every command, and making “the name of God to be blasphemed among the Gentiles,”—“far from God, and far from righteousness.” There was a fearful forgetfulness of the apostolic maxim—“He is not a Jew, who is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew, who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God,” Rom. ii. 28, 29. Nor was the propensity confined to the Jews:—it prevails still. It involves danger to all. It is deplorably manifesting itself in our own days. And many other sources are there of self-delusion—making men “pure in their own eyes, while they have not been washed from their filthiness.” They may think well of themselves, as saints and favourites of God, from high doctrinal profession, the antinomian “grace” which tempts the lofty talker and pretender “to continue in sin:”—dreams and visions, and impressions and special intimations of the safety of their state, while their character will not abide the Bible tests of true religion:—connexion with godly men, and especially with godly parents:—self-righteous and fanciful experiences, of which the extent and variety are sadly great:—peculiar circumstances in the manner of their own supposed conversion, of which they make much and are ever prone to talk,—dwell

ing more on themselves than on Christ,—more on what separates them from others, than on what is common to them with all believers ; while after all they are addicted to a variety of evils, which their fancied religious attainments hide from, or palliate to, their consciences, and keep their hearts in the enjoyment of a deceitful and ruinous self-complacency. O my brethren, while we pray sinners to bring themselves to the true standard of character, in order that they may see and feel their need of gospel grace ; let *us* be faithful in bringing ourselves and our profession of that gospel to the true test of faith in Christ and filial relationship to God ; “examining ourselves whether we be in the faith, proving our own selves ;” lest we be found having a name to live while we are dead,—a form of godliness while we are denying its power ;—lest we be of those who are “pure in their own eyes, and yet have not been washed from their filthiness.”

## LECTURE XCIII.

—◆—  
PROV. xxx. 13—20.

“There is a generation, O how lofty are their eyes! and their eyelids are lifted up. There is a generation whose teeth are as swords, and their jaw-teeth as knives, to devour the poor from off the earth, and the needy from among men. The horse-leech hath two daughters, crying, Give, give. There are three things that are never satisfied, yea, four things say not, It is enough: the grave; and the barren womb; the earth that is not filled with water; and the fire that saith not, It is enough. The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it. There be three things which are too wonderful for me, yea, four which I know not: the way of an eagle in the air, the way of a serpent upon a rock, the way of a ship in the midst of the sea, and the way of a man with a maid. Such is the way of an adulterous woman; she eateth, and wipeth her mouth, and saith, I have done no wickedness.”

THE first of these verses brings before us the haughty, self-consequential, and supercilious—the “generation” of those who carry their heads high, and look disdainfully down on all around them. This class of men too has been found abundantly in all ages. The spirit described may originate from various causes. There is the pride of *high birth*—of *aristocratic lineage*,—that regards with lofty scorn all that is plebeian and vulgar.—There is the pride and vanity of *riches*, that measures its importance and exacts its homage according to the number of its acres or of its bank deposits; and of this species of the evil there is none that is either so contemptible, so ridiculous, or so provoking, as the *purse-pride* of the weak-minded upstart who has risen suddenly to the self-consequence of a gold-and-silver greatness.—There

is what the poet has called "*the insolence of office*,"—the lofty and sometimes sufficiently ludicrous airs of men who have got themselves "clothed with a little brief authority;"—and this description of the silliness of self-elation is to be found in the ecclesiastical department of honours, as well as the civil, and in them both from the highest to the lowest grade of dignity,—from the woosack of the Lord Chancellor to the chair of the smallest municipal corporation; and from the throne of the Archbishop to the desk of an Independent church. There is also, I might mention, the *overbearing arrogance of learning*—real or pretended, profound or superficial; and the little but often very consequential vanity of various other descriptions of accomplishment. There is still another description of the character,—and in some respects the worst of all. It is exemplified in the sidelong glance of the self-vaunting Pharisee, when he said—"Or even as this publican!"—*the haughtiness of self-righteous consequence*, which holds its head erect, and lifts the eye of presumptuous boldness, before that God in whose presence archangels "veil their faces with their wings;"—and that to all fellow-men says, with the scowl of indignant disdain—"Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou." And indeed the spirit of the "Stand by thyself, come not near to me,"—may be regarded as, in every department, the spirit of the character before us. It says—"Stand by thyself," for I am *nobler*;—"Stand by thyself," for I am *richer*;—"Stand by thyself," for I am *wiser*;—"Stand by thyself," for I am *more learned and accomplished*;—"Stand by thyself," for I am by *office greater*;—as well as "Stand by thyself, for I am *holier* than thou."

All these and all other descriptions of pride are laid under severe condemnation and prohibition in the divine word. Its declarations are—"The lofty looks of men shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted:"—"God resisteth the proud:"—"The proud he knoweth afar off:"—"Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven:"—"Thus saith the high and lofty One that in-



habiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones:”—“Before honour is humility:”—“Every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalteth.”

Whenever any man comes aright to God,—that is, comes to him as a sinful and guilty creature,—feeling his own unworthiness, nothingness, and obnoxiousness to the divine displeasure,—abased in his own sight,—a suppliant for mercy,—all descriptions of pride will be brought down and crucified. They will no longer be indulged;—no longer vindicated under plausible excuses and palliative epithets. As a believing sinner, he will become, like his gracious Master, “meek and lowly in heart:”—his eyes no longer lofty, nor his eyelids lifted,—the *heart* being no longer haughty. “Put on, as the elect of God, humbleness of mind.”

Verse 14. “There is a generation whose teeth are as swords, and their jaw-teeth as knives, to devour the poor from off the earth, and the needy from among men.”—Here we have another class,—the generation of hard-hearted, cruel, insatiable oppressors. The forcible figurative expressions here used to depict them need no analysis. To analyse would be to weaken. They are persons who, whether to gratify their avarice, or their profligate ambition, or their love of pleasure and dissipation and extravagance, make no account of the property, the liberty, the peace, the comfort, the enjoyments, the very lives of others,—and especially of the poor,—when they stand in the way of their own gratification. We dwell not on the character. It is too often to be found. All history, alas! is full of it; nor would it be difficult to multiply examples of it, on a larger and on a smaller scale, in our own days. The history of conquest, of colonization, of slavery and slave-trading,—and of some departments of business, in which griping and grasping avarice—that “love of money which is the root of all evil,”—might furnish many a sad tale in the way of illustration. The character

is ever introduced in Scripture with the strongest expressions of divine detestation.\*

Verses 15, 16. "The horse-leech hath two daughters, crying, Give, give. There are three things that are never satisfied, yea, four things say not, It is enough: the grave; and the barren womb; the earth that is not filled with water; and the fire that saith not, It is enough."—There is an evident connexion between these verses and what precedes,—especially with the character described in the fourteenth verse. There is a *comparison* intended, in illustration of that character;—or rather a series of comparisons. There could not be a more apt one than the first. The "*horse-leech*," or *blood-sucker*,† gorges itself with blood, drawing it in with all possible eagerness, and never relaxing its hold,—still emptying itself, and still seeking more,—or filling itself even to bursting:—an appropriate image surely for the insatiable desires of the man of avarice, or of the profligate man of pleasure and extravagance. In the expression—"The horse-leech hath *two daughters*," there is by some thought to be an allusion to the two forks of the tongue by which it fastens itself to draw the blood. And different notions have been entertained as to what are meant by the "*two daughters*." It has been said that *daughter*, in the same way as *son*, is used to signify that which bears some striking resemblance to the thing of which it is represented as the son or the daughter:—and *cruelty* or *blood-thirstiness* and *covetousness* have been conceived the dispositions here meant to be thus represented. I confess myself very doubtful as to these views; and am much inclined to leave out the supplementary word *crying*, and to consider the *Give, Give*, as what Solomon intends by the daughters of the horse-leech: "The horse-leech hath *two daughters, Give, Give*."‡ The daughters have one name and one character. They plead and cater for the mother. The plain meaning is that the "horse-leech"

\* Chap. xxviii. 15—17, &c.

† The meaning is disputed. Stuart renders *vampire*.

‡ Stuart takes the same view. His work had not appeared when these Lectures were *prepared*.

is never satisfied. *Greed* is its very offspring:—"Give, Give," its two daughters. A more fit emblem, then, there could hardly be, for insatiable avarice, or the insatiable love of pleasure. What follows is also to be understood as being in the nature of comparison:—"There are three things that are never satisfied, yea, four things say not, It is enough: the grave; and the barren womb; the earth that is not filled with water; and the fire that saith not, It is enough." The meaning is—that the desires of avarice and of ambition and pleasure are insatiable, *as* the grave, and the barren womb, the earth, and the fire. Taking the words in this connexion, they are full of point and appropriateness. To take them by themselves, out of connexion with what they are clearly designed to illustrate, is to render them tame, rapid, and unworthy of the position they hold among divine sayings. "The grave" is still, since sin entered into the world, ever, ever, ever, opening its mouth for new victims. The barren womb is still fretfully impatient for the blessing of children—"Give me children, else I die." The earth "drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it," and is incessantly needing and craving fresh moisture,—and after long drought can hardly be saturated. The fire is ever requiring new supplies of fuel, consuming and devouring all that is thrown into it. *Such* are the insatiable appetites of avarice, pleasure, and ambition.

If you only suppose that, in *this* series of comparisons, Solomon has reference at once to the characters in the fourteenth verse and to those also in the twelfth and thirteenth—(the desire of notice, and admiration, and flattery, being as insatiable on the part of those who, in different ways, entertain the high conceit of themselves, however false and foolish, which is there described, as are the avaricious, the ambitious, and the sensual)—then, by taking the seventeenth verse in connexion with the eleventh, we shall have the series of comparisons complete. In the eleventh verse we have the generation of rebellious children—without natural affection: and in the seventeenth we have their sentence:—"The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall

pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it." Here too is a *figure*. It expresses the certain and fearful vengeance that shall fall upon despisers and mockers of parents. Think of it, my young friends. The eye that winks in mockery,—or that leers with disdain,—or that kindles in hatred and rage,—or that turns away with indifference or aversion,—that eye indicates states of heart which the Lord abhors, and which He will visit with punitive vengeance. Although the language is manifestly figurative, and the birds of prey that pick out the guilty eye are but emblems of the avenging displeasure of a sin-hating God, bringing punishment upon the guilty soul,—yet has it not unfrequently been verified to the letter. All who have marked the history of crime are well aware how many criminals who have come to the gallows, have acknowledged the commencement of their career of vice and villainy to have been *contempt of parents*. And these, after public execution, have been thrown to the beasts and birds of prey; or they have been gibbeted in irons, till the mocking eye has been picked out by the ravens of the valley, or devoured by the young eagles, and the carrion fowls have eaten their flesh from their bones. Let the young take warning,—and beware of every rising emotion of disrespect, and of every word, or look, or act of contempt and insubordination:—"Honour thy father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise."

The following verses must, in like manner, be understood in the way of *comparison*:—and so understood, they are full of force, and full of practical instruction—verses 18—20. "There be three things which are too wonderful for me, yea, four which I know not: the way of an eagle in the air, the way of a serpent upon a rock, the way of a ship in the midst of the sea, and the way of a man with a maid. Such is the way of an adulterous woman; she eateth, and wipeth her mouth, and saith, I have done no wickedness."—What is the comparison? It is that of the wiles of the infamous and practised seducer of female honour and virtue,—and of the arts of the intriguing and accomplished adulteress, both in laying wait for her prey, and in concealing her guilt—to

“the way of an eagle in the air, the way of a serpent upon a rock, and the way of a ship in the midst of the sea:”—and a warning is thus conveyed with regard to both,—a practical and profitable warning. It is not the philosophical or scientific principle on which the eagle flies, by which she is borne up on the air, and by which all her motions are effected, that is here the subject of wonder, although wonderful it is, and like everything else in nature, fitted to fill the observant mind with devout admiration:—neither is it the peculiar structure, and the laws of muscular motion connected with it, by which the convolutions, and the side and forward movements of the serpent are accomplished and regulated:—nor is it the mechanical principle, applied and adjusted by the skill of man, by which the ship is upheld on the water, and is propelled, and “turned whithersoever the governor listeth.” It is not to these,—no, not at all—that Agur refers. His lesson is one, not in natural or in physical science or in human art,—but one in *morals*,—one relative to vice and to virtue,—to the dangers from the one, and the necessity of carefully guarding the other. The spirit of the comparison, in all the three cases, lies in the difficulty or the impossibility of *tracing the path*. The capricious windings, and circlings, and dartings and hoverings, and risings and fallings, of the eagle, no one can follow. The bird itself could not trace the same course again. The path of the serpent is intricately tortuous, bending, and twisting, and convoluting, and pushing itself in every possible direction;—so that there is no tracing of its foldings and doublings. The ship’s course is instantly lost: and it tacks and retacks, and stretches from point to point, to attain its destination. It is impossible to follow the very same track again.

And in addition to the impossibility of tracing the course, there is another thing in the comparison. There is, in each of the cases, *an end in view, an object to be effected*. The eagle adapts its various movements, so as at last to pounce upon its prey:—the serpent, tortuous as is his path, has his aim, and reaches it:—the ship, with the wind ahead, shifts and tacks about; but still with a certain point to be gained.

The comparison is of these three things to *two others*—to the manifold wiles of the artful and vile seducer:—and to the similar arts of the crafty adulteress in luring secretly her prey, and in hiding from detection her infamy. —Artful villains—wretches for whom no term of infamy is too strong—insinuate themselves into the affections of young women, by an endless diversity of schemes and stratagems,—of pretensions, and promises, and flatteries, and sophistical arguments, and protestations, and persuasions, such as cannot be all unravelled:—

“ Studied, sly, ensnaring arts,”

varying according to characters and circumstances;—like the wheelings and circlings of the eagle in the air,—or the curvatures of “the crooked serpent” upon a rock,—or the tackings and doublings of a ship at sea. And, as in these cases there is no trace of the course left, so in the case which they illustrate, the great art is, to *leave no trace* by which the progress and consummation of guilt can afterwards be marked and substantiated.\*

So too the unfaithful—the adulterous wife, is full of artifice,—this being in her case even more necessary than in the other. And when she has secured her end,—there is artifice to conceal it—to impose upon her injured husband. She here appears before us, most graphically, assuming the air of perfect composure—of one completely at her ease;—her conscience, if not actually seared, brought under sufficient coercive control to cover all emotion. She sits down as usual to her meal, with her husband and family,—with full self-possession and indifference of manner,—just as if nothing had happened; “eating, and wiping her mouth, and saying, I have done no evil”—telling tales perhaps of the guilt of others, affecting to shudder at them, and comparing her own innocence with their shameful conduct.

I dwell not on these monstrous evils. Read the early chapters of this book, ye youthful and thoughtless especially,

\* Comp. chap. v. 6.

and weigh them well. You will find there an abundance of faithful and affectionate warning—warning drawn from both observation and woful experience, of the criminality and the ruinous consequences to body, soul, and estate,—for time and for eternity,—of the evils in question, evils against which faithfulness commands us to warn, and to warn with all possible earnestness,—while delicacy and propriety forbid enlargement.

I conclude by beseeching God's spiritual children to cultivate the tempers and pursue the courses of conduct, that stand opposed to those of the "*generations*" described in this passage.—Ye who *have* parents,—and especially *young* professors—cherish and display the reverential and dutiful affection that ought ever to be maintained towards father and mother.—Cultivate all of you real inward purity of heart, from which there will spring a growing purity of life.—Cherish a lowly spirit:—"be clothed with humility,"—not humility on your knees before the throne merely, but humility which, when you rise from your knees, and mingle with your family and with the world, diffuses its lovely influence over your entire deportment.—Cultivate benevolent kindness, in affection of heart, in the words of the mouth, and in beneficent activity, towards all who come within the sphere of your influence;—"doing good to all, and especially to them who are of the household of faith:"—"putting on, as the elect of God, bowels of mercies." "Take heed, and beware of covetousness:"—"lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven:"—and as to ambition, let "the honour that cometh from God," rather than that which men bestow, be what you seek and long to secure. And beware of every unchaste thought, word, and action. Let, in short, your entire course of life, in all its departments,—in your closets with God,—in your homes with your families,—in your fields, your warehouses, and your workshops,—in all your private and your public intercourse,—be constantly under the regulating, the impelling, and the restraining influence of the fear and the love of God. Thus "work out your own salvation," and "hold forth the word of life."

## LECTURE XCIV.

—◆—  
PROV. xxx. 21—33.

“For three things the earth is disquieted, and for four which it cannot bear: for a servant when he reigneth; and a fool when he is filled with meat; for an odious woman when she is married; and an handmaid that is heir to her mistress. There be four things which are little upon the earth, but they are exceeding wise: the ants are a people not strong, yet they prepare their meat in the summer; the conies are but a feeble folk, yet make they their houses in the rocks; the locusts have no king, yet go they forth all of them by bands; the spider taketh hold with her hands, and is in kings’ palaces. There be three things which go well, yea, four are comely in going: a lion, which is strongest among beasts, and turneth not away for any; a grey-hound; an he-goat also; and a king, against whom there is no rising up. If thou hast done foolishly in lifting up thyself, or if thou hast thought evil, lay thine hand upon thy mouth. Surely the churning of milk bringeth forth butter, and the wringing of the nose bringeth forth blood; so the forcing of wrath bringeth forth strife.”

THE particulars here enumerated have reference to both public and private life. They have many a time created, and are calculated from their nature to create, much disturbance and mischief in the different departments of human society. We shall first offer a few remarks on each, and then you will be able to judge of their extensive comprehensiveness.

1. “*For a servant when he reigneth.*”—History is not without examples—and especially the history of ancient eastern nations, of men of low extraction and of mean and ignoble spirit and character, who, by favouring circumstances, have either raised themselves, or for the purposes of others have been raised, to stations of authority and power. Such men are apt to become intoxicated by their sudden or their



self-acquired elevation:—and the haughtiness of self-importance is nearly allied to, and naturally draws after it in its train, the spirit of imperiousness, cruelty, rapacity, and oppression,—of impatience of contradiction and control,—of fierceness and vindictiveness,—of incessant jealousy—a jealousy engendered by the very consciousness of their being out of place and the objects of envy and indignant pride on the part of others—as harbouring designs and framing plots against their crowns or against their lives:—and *this* jealousy, like other descriptions of it, is “cruel as the grave.”

Moreover, a slave, or menial, is not supposed to have the fitness and competency, in point of mental culture, habits of life, knowledge of mankind and of the science of government, or comprehensiveness and foresight in his views, for the exercise of rule. His elevation is a departure from the ordinary course of things in society, and is not to be expected to be productive of good;—not only on account of his own defective qualifications, but the inevitable risks, springing from such causes as those already adverted to, of conspiracies and seditions, of rebellions and civil wars,—so fearfully destructive of the peace and order, the prosperity and happiness, of every community.

There is in the words, as in most of the proverbs of the same form, a *general principle* applicable to the cases of all persons who are suddenly raised, and raised high it may be, above their level, to stations they are not competent to fill. Disquietude and vexation are the natural consequences. And those who, unhappily, are not sensible of their own deficiencies, and, from “thinking of themselves more highly than they ought to think,” aspire to situations which are above them, are the most likely, if they obtain the gratification of their ambition, to abuse the power which they get into their hands. “The earth is disquieted” by them; “it cannot bear them.”

2. “*For a fool when he is filled with meat.*”—We have many times had occasion to notice the character meant by Solomon under this designation of “fool;” and Agur is to be understood as using it in the same sense.

His being "*filled with meat*" may be understood *literally* as descriptive of the fool indulging to repletion in eating and drinking,—by which his spirit is elevated, by which the restraints of the fear of God and man are for the time removed. Then their unprincipled folly breaks forth in all its exuberance, without control, and carries them frequently beyond all the limits of possible sufferance. They give full and free scope to their insolent self-sufficiency, their impertinence, their scurrility and abuse, their disputatiousness, their profaneness, their obscenity, or their sheer and drivelling nonsense, in such a way as causes a large amount of present laceration and distress to the feelings of others:—and then, their words uttered, and their actions done, in these circumstances, frequently give rise to consequences extensively and permanently mischievous.

But being "*filled with meat*," may be understood as *the image of temporal prosperity*. "When thou hast eaten and art full," was, in the language of Moses to the Israelites, the expression for *abundance of temporal good*:—and a part of Asaph's description of the prosperous man of the world—whom he denominates "the foolish" and "the wicked"—is, "Their eyes stand out with fatness; they have more than heart could wish." And Paul, in describing his own spirit of contentment, says—"I know both how to be *full* and to be *hungry*,—both to *abound* and to *suffer need*." In this view of the words, the character before us in them is that of the man who prospers in the world, but has neither sense nor principle to make a right use of his abundance;—whom it elates with purse-proud insolence, with all its quarrelsomeness and fiery jealousy, which exacts the punctilios of haughtiness, and which nothing but blood will appease;—or who squanders it in every way that is pernicious to society around him,—in all that is vile, and vicious, and mischievous,—drawing others in numbers, along with him, into the ways of profligacy, and debauchery, and crime. By such characters "the earth is disquieted; it cannot bear them."

3. "*For an odious woman when she is married*."—Here we come into *domestic life*—which may be called the nur-

sery of human society—in which, to a great extent, the character of communities is formed. “*An odious woman*” is a woman of unamiable character,—whose temper is violent, contentious, and quarrelsome, or peevish, fretful, and unreasonable; or, still worse, who is addicted to shameful vices,—as of insobriety and incontinence. Such a woman is utterly unfit for the care and management of a family, in any one of its departments,—as a wife, as a mother, or as a mistress. When unhappily she finds one who, whether from ignorance or infatuation, unites himself with her, she produces a whole lifetime of disquietude, vexation, and wretchedness to husband, and family, and connexions, and friends. She makes her yoke-fellow *rue the day* that he made so luckless or so mad a choice,—having chosen one of “those cheats, who are doves in their virgin state, and vultures the week after they are married.”\* By such characters—in domestic life, “the earth is disquieted; it cannot bear them.”

4. “*And an handmaid that is heir to her mistress.*”—This is evidently a case similar in nature to the *first* of the four—“*a servant when he reigneth.*” It is one of the same *genus*,—an inversion of the natural and proper order of society. It is the case of a maid-servant, who, by humouring, and pleasing, and flattering, and coaxing, has got about her mistress, ingratiated herself into her good-liking,—as Matthew Henry quaintly says, “got the length of her foot,”—and has thus induced her to put her into her will, as the heiress of her fortune—of all that she has. Such things had been, it would appear; and such things may be still. And from the tendencies before stated, a person of this description is all but sure to be selfish, insolent, and overbearing; either from the ascendancy she has acquired, and her knowledge of what is before her, (especially to any whom she may have outwitted, and supplanted, and disappointed of their hopes)—or from the sudden possession of property, without strength of mind to bear the change, or prudence and discretion to improve it to any good purpose.

\* Comp. chaps. xix. 13; xxi. 9, 19, &c.

Another view, and a much worse one, has been taken of the case—as being that of a servant who has supplanted her mistress in the affections of her husband,—found ways and means to usurp her place there, gained an ascendancy over him, and induced him to give her, tacitly or by express engagement, the prospect of succession,—or possibly even to divorce his wife upon false pretexts, or to make her so miserable as to force her to separation,—that he may live with the usurper of her rights, and give her all that he *can* of what should have gone to the other. This is indeed a case of fearful and intolerable distress. O! what an entire and wretched overthrow of all the blessings—in themselves, virtuously enjoyed, so exquisite and so precious,—of domestic life!—What bitterness, and alienation, and jealousy, and heart-break, and family ruin and desolation!—For such characters “the earth is disquieted; it cannot bear them.”

And now, just notice the comprehensiveness, in regard to the happiness of human life, of the *four things* thus enumerated. They begin, observe, at *the throne*, and come down to the *domestic servant*. They embrace four great sources of the social unhappiness of mankind. These are—*incompetent rule, prosperous and besotted folly, conjugal alienation and strife with its domestic miseries, and the unnatural inversion of social order.*

In the four verses which follow we have an assemblage of instances of what we may term the instructive wisdom of the inferior creation; which, in all its departments, is full of lessons to man, if man had but the wit to learn and the inclination to follow them.—*Nature is the art of God. Instinct is the wisdom of God.* Few things, if any, are more difficult than to draw the line, with any precision, between *instinct* and *reason*. A great deal (as might easily be shown, were this the time and place for the discussion,) of what is thoughtlessly ascribed to the former, bears all the marks and indications of the latter. We many a time call the very thing *instinct* in the brute which we call *reason* in man. The truth is, that *man* has his *instincts*, and that *brutes* have their *reason*. But the difference in degree is so immense as

fully to justify the designations of *rational* and *irrational*. The great leading distinction in *kind* between man and beast lies in *a sense of God and of moral responsibility*, connected at the same time, with the attribute of immortality, of which *both* pertain to *man*, and *neither* to the *beast*. But, without entering into any metaphysical distinctions on the subject of reason and instinct, whether in man or in brute, it is enough to say that the cases here brought before us are cases, to a great extent at least, of *pure instinct*. We have—

1. The ANTS. We cannot enter into the natural history of these little creatures, of which there are many varieties, and of which accounts the most extraordinary, yet well authenticated, are on record. The words before us limit our attention to one point—the same point Solomon had brought before us toward the beginning of this book, in his inculcation of *providence and industry*:—"The ants are a people not strong, yet they prepare their meat in the summer."\* Thus these little and feeble creatures supply the lack of strength by combination and perseverance,—all directed to an end, and yet that end, we have no reason to imagine, thought of at the time. By an instinctive propensity, common to them all, though more extraordinary in some tribes of them than in others,—and, there is every ground to believe, manifested and exercised by them all, from the creation of the world to the present hour; yet at times with an adaptation to peculiar circumstances, and a mutual communication and harmonious co-operation one with another, altogether confounding;—by this propensity, I say, they provide against the coming winter enough, and more than enough, for their own sustenance and that of their young; and make the provision without any knowledge on their part of the changes of the seasons, or of the astronomical causes of those changes. The instinct that guides them is one of the varieties of the "manifold wisdom" of Him who formed them; at once giving them their being, and adapting their natures to their modes of life.

\* See chap. vi. 6—8.

2. We have next the CONIES:—"The conies are but a feeble folk, yet make they their houses in the rocks." It is the same animal that is mentioned, and with a similar distinctive property, in Ps. civ. 18. It has been with naturalists and Hebricians, a matter of question what the animal is that is meant by the original term. This is not a point of material consequence in regard to the *lesson* designed to be conveyed. The two qualities here mentioned are, *feebleness* and *dwelling in the rocks*. It seems pretty generally agreed, that the animal meant is not what we term *the coney*.<sup>\*</sup> It is, most probably, what was called the *daman Israel* or *Israel's lamb*; spoken of as a harmless creature, resembling in size and qualities the *rabbit*, and quite agreeing with the description before us,—being distinguished for its feebleness, which it supplies like the former, by its instinctive wisdom and sagacity; and by its making its nest or habitation in the clefts of the rocks,—to which it shows decided attachment, as well as by its being gregarious, and living in families or little companies. Their "*houses*" are very commodious residences, and secure refuges from their enemies and pursuers. Incapable of protecting themselves by any strength, or any powerful offensive weapon, with which many other animals are provided, nature teaches them to betake themselves for protection and safety to the rocks of the mountains. And what is nature but the God of nature?—and what this instinct but again God's manifold wisdom?

3. We have the LOCUSTS:—"The locusts have no king, yet go they forth all of them by bands." The accounts given by naturalists and travellers of the countless myriads of these insects, which go in such immense and compacted legions, as to darken the air and to desolate the richest and most fertile districts to a vast extent, in an incredibly short space of time, are very astonishing. They formed, as all of you are aware, one of the plagues of Egypt. It is not, however, to their destructive ravages that our attention is here called:—it

<sup>\*</sup> *Conies* do not appear to build among the rocks; and it is doubted whether they are indigenous to Palestine. Some render the word here used *mountain-mice*.

is to the regularity and unanimity of their simultaneous movements. They keep time, and they keep rank,—they rise, they fly, they halt, they settle again for the purposes of devastation for their own support,—just as if they did every thing by direction, under the orders of a general, with one consent, and for the common good. I may direct you for a fine and highly poetical illustration of this in the book of the prophet Joel—only of course premising that under the figure of an invading army the prophet is describing the judicial visitation of God by the devastating swarms of the locust,—of whose approach the noise was sometimes heard at the distance of several miles,—“the sound of their wings being as the sound of chariots and horsemen rushing to battle.”\*

4. We have the SPIDER.—This insect, on different accounts, is not a favourite. But its structure is full of wonders:—and the assiduity, and persevering diligence of the little creature, and the ingenuity, the delicacy, and the appropriateness of its workmanship, together with its varied adaptation to places, and situations, and circumstances,—are all very interesting, and very curious and surprising. She “*layeth hold with her hands,*” and the neatness, the fineness, and the despatch, with which she draws out her threads, the firmness with which she attaches them, and the symmetry and strength with which she intertwines and weaves them together; and then the patience with which she lies in wait for her prey, and the instant alertness with which she springs upon, seizes, and secures it, either devouring it, or fastening it for future use,—are all admirable.† Thus both gregarious and solitary creatures, according to their respective characters and modes of life, read to us lessons of practical wisdom. For assuredly, those here mentioned were introduced not merely as furnishing facts in natural history, but for the purposes of moral and prudential instruction.

\* See Joel ii. 2—11, 25.

† Stuart contends, perhaps correctly, that the word should be rendered *Lizard*; and it would, in some respects at least, be sufficiently appropriate if it is in Palestine as in India; where in every dwelling, from the palace to the hovel, the little house-lizard may be seen on the walls watching for and darting upon its prey.

The lesson taught us by the *ants*, as we have seen, is that of diligence, discretion, and foresight.—The lesson from the *coney*, or rather the *Israel's Lamb*, is the duty of prudent regard to residence, and security for ourselves and families against discomfort and danger—against all enemies and invaders.—From the *locust* we learn the importance and benefit of order, and union, and co-operation, for the accomplishment of objects of common interest whether civil or sacred. From the *spider* we learn the advantage of skill, ingenuity, and industry in all the arts and occupations of life. And by the expression which Agur adds—“*and is in kings' palaces,*” we seem to be taught an additional lesson; this expression being apparently designed to associate in our minds the ideas of diligence and ingenuity with honour, distinction, advancement. There is no saying what men who, in station and appearance, are the most unpromising may, by dint of these virtues, attain to.\*

We may even conceive views of still more enlarged comprehensiveness as being included in these verses. It has been remarked by some, that the four emblems express all that is requisite for the conservation and well-being of a STATE or KINGDOM. There is *supply of food*;—*commodious and secure dwelling-places*;—*subordination, concord, and united exertion*;—and the *prevalence and encouragement of the ingenious and useful arts*. These are things that governors and kings should look to. And we may apply the emblematic lessons to *domestic* life. Before a man can prudently marry, and have a family, he should have some suitable provision made, and something like a fair prospect of being able to support them. Next is to be found a suitable dwelling, adapted to his circumstances and convenience. Then, when settled, there must be harmony, union, co-operation, in all departments of the household. And lastly, there must be the diligent, constant, persevering application of his skill and labour to his worldly calling. And to these allow me to add, without charging me with being

\* See chap. xxii. 29



fanciful,—that, as these creatures derive their instincts from God, and act under his superintendence and direction, *that* God should be acknowledged by us in all our ways and in all our doings, and in all the comforts and enjoyments which are their results, as the blessed source of all we are, of all we have, of all we enjoy, and of all we hope for.

Another lesson still let us learn—namely, to estimate men not by external condition or greatness, but by their *wisdom*; making the “mind the standard of the man.” These creatures appear insignificant; but they are commended to our admiration by their sagacity and skill. So—“there is a spirit in man; and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding.” And when man, in the position which *he* holds in the scale of being, acts as consistently with the ends of his existence,—with his character and his destinies, as these creatures do with theirs,—then is there room for our highest admiration!—“The chief end of man is—to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever!”

Verses 29—31. “There be three things which go well, yea, four are comely in going: a lion, which is strongest among beasts, and turneth not away for any; a grey-hound; an he-goat also; and a king, against whom there is no rising up.” Here too lessons of moral wisdom are meant to be conveyed. We are not for a moment to suppose that the intention of Agur is merely to invite us to admire the gait of the “lion,” the king of beasts, who marches on in the nobility of his might, in courageous consciousness of his power, altering not his pace, and fearless of whatever comes in his way:—or the grace and elegance of the “greyhound,” and the nimble fleetness of his course,\*—or the portly dignity of the leader of the flock, that walks at their head, conducting and caring for them:—or the majesty of royal authority and honour, of a king maintaining his dignity, bearing his crowned head with the stateliness of office.

I am disposed to think that here, as in verses 18, 19, we

\* The original word means *contracted* or *girt* in the loins. Some from this have thought the *war-horse* meant:—but the descriptive term applies well to the greyhound.

are to interpret the language on the principle of an intended comparison between the last of the four and the three preceding; that is—of a *king* to the *lion*, the *greyhound*, and the *he-goat*. In the peculiarities of the three animals, the characteristics of the *king's* character are figured:—his courage and undaunted intrepidity by the lion;—his readiness for activity and speed in the pursuit of every legitimate object,—as well as fit elegance and gracefulness, by the greyhound;—and his becoming example set before his people, leading them in right ways, and caring for their safety, by the he-goat. And there are lessons *for all*; that all should maintain a deportment *dignified, becoming, and exemplary*,—such as will command respect, repress the forward petulance of self-sufficiency, and conceit,—subdue opposition, and induce imitation, and conciliate affection.

What he had said of the king probably suggests verse 32. “If thou hast done foolishly in lifting up thyself, or if thou hast thought evil, lay thine hand upon thy mouth.”\* The meaning seems to be—when thou art made sensible of having done wrong by taking too much upon thee in the royal presence,—conducting thyself in any way with deficiency of due respect;—or, when thou art conscious of having “thought,”—intended and meditated evil;—then thy best and most becoming, and withal thy safest course, is immediate submission and silence; not eager self-vindication, not hasty and irritating words,—not recriminating and laying the blame on others; and seeking to palliate unduly thine own behaviour,—but to the full extent to which thy consciousness of wrong reaches, “confessing and forsaking.” This is in itself the dictate of *propriety*: and it is at the same time that of *prudence*. The reason follows:—verse 33. “Surely the churning of milk bringeth forth butter, and the wringing of the nose bringeth forth blood; so the forcing of wrath bringeth forth strife.” As these causes produce their respective effects,—effects which naturally follow, which every one expects,—so —“the forcing of wrath”—by obstinate self-vindication, or

\* Comp. Eccl. viii. 3.

by arrogant and reproachful language, as if one were trying how far he might go in putting the royal forbearance and clemency to the test,—“bringeth forth strife,”—produces the most violent and implacable animosities and contentions;—and with a king “against whom there is no rising up,” what can be more infatuated?

To conclude, let us all seek, by fulfilling aright the duties becoming the spheres in which Providence has called us to move, to be a blessing in the circle of our influence, and not a curse. Let others, if they will, “glory in their shame,” in disquieting, troubling, harassing all about them; but let *us* cultivate and carry out into practice all those dispositions which are fitted to secure for us the affection, esteem, and blessing of our fellow-creatures.

Let us further, in the exercise of sound wisdom, derive hints and lessons from nature around us. We may learn much that is practically useful and salutary from those animals in the inferior creation, which God has so wonderfully fitted for their respective situations and functions. O how many are there, who stand condemned by the example and the silent but emphatic admonitions of these creatures,—admonished for improvidence, and carelessness, and irregularity, and sloth!—for discontent and insubordination!—for trifling, impatience, and want of perseverance; for timidity and meanness in duty!—for deficiency in promptitude and alertness!—for neglect of those committed to their care and training!—and last of all, but not least—for failing to answer the end of their being! These all, according to their irrational natures, by fulfilling their respective functions, under the operation of the instincts of their different constitutions, show forth the glory of their Maker. But man, the rational creature, uses not *his* higher powers and endowments, as he ought, in voluntary and delighted subserviency to this highest and best of ends,—the true end of his existence and of all that he is, as an intelligent, moral, and immortal being. Earnestly would I urge on all with immediate and special reference to the King of kings—the lesson of these words—“If thou hast done foolishly in lifting up thyself, or if thou hast thought evil, lay

thine hand upon thy mouth." O! if there be duty, and if there be safety in the course recommended, as it respects a monarch of this world—after all, but a man whose "breath is in his nostrils," with what unutterably greater force and conclusiveness, in application to *Him!* How infatuated in sinful creatures of the dust, to lift themselves up, in self-righteous and rebellious pride, against the God of heaven! Surely submission here is at once duty, wisdom, safety. "*Lay thine hand upon thy mouth.*" Confess guilt, and bow to the sceptre of mercy. "Let the potsherders strive with the potsherders of the earth; but woe to the man that striveth with his Maker." The admonition of Jesus is, in its fullest force of import, applicable to the case of the sinner with his God:—"Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison."—God is an adversary to you only *as sinners persisting in your sins*. He seeks your reconciliation. He offers you His friendship. He is revealed to you as "in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." And the entreaty of His gospel to every one of you is—"Be reconciled unto God:—for he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."

## LECTURE XCV.

PROV. XXXI. 1—9.

“The words of king Lemuel, the prophecy that his mother taught him. What, my son? and what, the son of my womb? and what, the son of my vows? Give not thy strength unto women, nor thy ways to that which destroyeth kings. It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine, nor for princes strong drink; lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted. Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts. Let him drink and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more. Open thy mouth for the dumb in the cause of all such as are appointed to destruction. Open thy mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy.”

THIS chapter stands in a predicament quite similar to the one preceding it. They were, in all probability, both found among the writings of Solomon;—a portion of what he had collected, along with his proverbs, for the instruction of his people, and which were “copied out” by the “men of Hezekiah.” Like the former, they obtained their place in the Jewish canon under divine direction; and constituted, without doubt, a part of those “Holy Scriptures” referred to by Christ and his Apostles, and of which Paul especially speaks as “given by inspiration of God.”

To the question, *Who was Lemuel?* it is impossible to return any certain answer. Some think it was a name given to Solomon himself. It signifies, “*One belonging to God,*” and is thus similar in its signification to Jedidiah. There is, however, nothing in the history that affords any ground for supposing that his mother, Bathsheba, gave him any other name than those which are there recorded; though the

idea has the countenance of Jewish writers, as well as of several Christian commentators. And if Bathsheba was young when Solomon was born, and lived to a great age, it is not impossible that, in her old days, she might perceive the commencing symptoms of her son's backsliding from God, and in such terms as those in this passage utter the grief and bitter anguish of her spirit.—But the more probable opinion is, that Lemuel was a neighbouring prince, whose mother was a pious Jewess, visited at times, as was the case with other females, by the spirit of inspiration, and whose instructions have received the stamp of divine authority by their admission into the sacred canon.

As the words are called at once "*the words of king Lemuel,*" and "*the prophecy*\* (or inspired communication) *which his mother taught him;*"—we learn that the son, whosoever he was, paid a reverential and affectionate regard to the counsels of the mother,—carefully recording and preserving them; and it may thence be presumed, following them out in his course of life.

Verse 2. "What, my son? and what, the son of my womb? and what, the son of my vows?"—Of this verse there are two principles of explanation; of either of which, according to the circumstances in which the words may be conceived to have been uttered, it is susceptible.

1. It may be interpreted as the expression of surprise,—of regret, and grief, and bitterness of spirit, in the disappointment of fond anticipations, arising from the discovery of symptoms and tendencies to evil on the part of one who was the object of so much tender love and so much prayerful solicitude. In this view, the expostulation is full of interesting and irresistible persuasiveness:—it is an appeal to filial affection, and a commentary on the first of the proverbs of Solomon, (chap. x. 1.) "A wise son maketh a glad father: but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother." "What!

\* The word is here, as in the first verse of the preceding chapter, rendered by Stuart as a proper name—"The words of Lemuel, king of *Massa*; which his mother taught him:"—the rules of Hebrew syntax making the rendering in the English translation "an impossible construction."

*my son!*” the object of the mother’s fond affection!—an affection in which there is a force and a tenderness which none but mothers know!—“and what! *the son of my womb!*” —part of my very self! the fruit of my travelling pangs! for whom “I had sorrow when my hour was come,” and for whom “I forgot the anguish for joy that a man was born into the world!” “And what! *the son of my vows!*”—the subject of many an anxious and earnest prayer, and of much pious and solemn dedication to God! Is this the result—this the reward of all? Am I indeed to see thee departing from the living God,—and pursuing the paths of irreligion, and folly, and worldliness, and vice, which lead down to the chambers of death? O! sad, sad day! O! bitter, bitter disappointment! Are all my cares, and counsels, and tears and prayers, to end in this?

2. The words may be explained as the utterance of an earnest desire, by salutary and affectionate counsel, to anticipate and prevent evil—evil to which all experience and observation had taught her there was a perilous propensity in the heart, and many temptations in the life, and especially in the life of those who were called to move amidst the honours and the pleasures of the world in high places,—“What shall I say to thee, my son?—the son of my womb? the son of my vows? What advice shall a mother give thee, who is solicitous about thine own best interests, and about the well-being of the people thou art commissioned by providence to govern?” She then admonishes her son against those vices which she knew to be a special source of danger: and she does so in a manner calculated to interest, impress, and melt his heart,—appealing, with the tenderness of maternal to the tenderness of filial love:—“What! my son! and what! the son of my womb!—and what the son of my vows!—It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink: lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of the afflicted.”

The vices thus warned against are the libertine indulgences of the *seraglio* and the *banquet*. Here, as in many other places, the two are connected together. They were generally

associated then, as they are still,—both in the superior and the inferior circles of society. The courses mentioned were fitted to enervate both body and mind. They tended to indolence,—to negligent and slothful disregard of public obligations and duties,—and to the prostitution and abuse of royal eminence; as if high station were bestowed for the gratification of the selfish and vicious inclinations of those raised to it, instead of the benefit of those over whom they were set. The warning was given to the future kings of Israel by Moses, Deut. xvii. 17—and the anticipated evil was mournfully realized in Solomon's own case, “Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? yet among many nations was there no king like him, who was beloved of his God, and God made him king over all Israel: nevertheless even him did outlandish women cause to sin,” Neh. xiii. 26. It was indeed a miserable contrast to the delightfully interesting and promising outset of his reign,—between his *youth* and his *age*,—the former shaming the latter, instead of (what ought to have been) the latter improving upon the former, and realizing its promises.\* Whether the words of Lemuel's mother were spoken before or after the time when this wretched defection took place,—the fact of the defection shows how imminent was the danger, and how much reason there was for the warning.

The principle of the caution is applied to the priests, “whose lips should keep knowledge, as being the messengers of the Lord of hosts.”† The admonition was given at the time when the sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, had “offered strange fire before the Lord,” and had been struck dead by fire from His presence. Whence the conclusion appears natural, that they had been in a state of insobriety when they fell into the sin for which they suffered. And if they were, we have in their case a clear proof that one sin can be no excuse for another.‡

\* See 1 Kings xi. 4—10.

† See Lev. x. 10.

‡ It is said of an ancient prince, that he made a law that if a man committed a crime when he was intoxicated, he should be held guilty of two offences, and be punished for both.



But such maxims and cautions apply *to all*. In all, at all times, in all places, and in all circumstances, the mind ought to be in entire and undisturbed possession and exercise of its powers, for the transaction of business,—for the discharge of duty—for the avoidance of temptation. In every condition and relation of life, sobriety should be one of the cardinal virtues. It well deserves such a designation, when so very much *hinges* upon it. Let it be impressed upon every conscience, that in every instance in which, even in the slightest degree, the regular exercise of the powers of the mind is affected and impaired—*there is sin*. But let it not be even *thus* limited. Let it not be imagined that no sin is committed, unless, in some degree or other, there is the unsettlement of reason. There may be a large amount of sin where there is nothing of the kind. There are those mentioned in Scripture who are “mighty to drink wine, and men of might to mingle strong drink”—a most noble, dignified, estimable, praise-worthy distinction,—the most difficult and elevated of human acquirements! They have actually succeeded in training their stomachs to stand more than those of their neighbours, in this most exalted department of the human faculties! And they boast of their powers. They fancy and flatter themselves that there is no harm, so long as they are able to keep themselves decently sober. What a mistake! Their powers, when thus prostituted and abused, are their degradation and disgrace. And there is *sin* as well as shame. They are guilty of criminal *waste*. They are guilty too of setting a fearful example, encouraging others in the trial of their powers of endurance in the same way,—and glorying in the sin and shame of those whom, in this worse than beastly competition, they have succeeded (as the phrase is) in “laying under the table.” In the higher circles of society, there is, happily, much less of this amongst us than there once was. It is well when fashion takes the right side,—the side of virtue. And it were well, if the example of temperance, spreading downwards, should reach every rank and condition of the community; well for individuals, for families and neighbourhoods, for cities, for communities!

Are wine and strong drink, then, absolutely and in all cases, useless and worse than useless?—in no cases to be used?—in none to be given? The inspired writer does not say so.

Verses 6, 7. “Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts. Let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more.”—Some imagine, that in the phrase “*ready to perish*” there is an allusion to the practice of administering a potion of strong mixed wine to criminals when led to execution, for the purpose of stupefying them, and so diminishing their sensibility to suffering. Such a potion the Saviour, when on the cross, declined to drink. He would not seem as if he were impatient of the sufferings he was enduring, or diminish by a single pang the expiatory agonies of the substitute and atoning Redeemer of the lost. There is no necessity for supposing such an allusion. The phrase is meant to be descriptive of a class of persons who are on the brink of some very heavy and ruinous calamity,—who are overwhelmed with apprehension, and fainting in despondency:—as the other phrase is of persons whose souls are embittered by the severe distresses of extreme poverty and privation, with their attendant evils,—or by any affliction that preys upon the mind, oppressing and dispiriting it. To such as these it is that the “wine” and the “strong drink” are here recommended.

I pity the state of that man’s mind, who can for one moment allow himself to suppose that this passage contains an inspired toleration of *excess*;—a permission and encouragement to the destitute and the afflicted and disconsolate, to drown the remembrance of their cares, and the sense of their ills, either in the intemperate carousals of social indulgence, or in secret and solitary application to the contents of the bottle;—to seek their relief in the insensibility of intoxication, or even to chase away the real sadness of care and mental trouble by the false and temporary excitement and merriment of strong drinks;—to make wine, in its inebriating excesses, the refuge from melancholy!—Would it be fair to set this one passage against the whole Bible?—one text

against its entire scope and unnumbered positive and pointed and damnatory prohibitions? That were to treat the Bible as we treat no other book:—and indeed many a time has it been treated thus, as no other book has been. But when men do take hold of a passage like this, and turn it into merriment, and enjoy it, and quote it with a leer while they are putting the bottle to each other's mouths and drinking themselves drunk,—they only discover the bent of their minds, and the inclinations of their hearts. They know all the while that the Bible condemns them, and that while they perversely cite this text over their jovial cups, a thousand others could be thundered in their ears, denouncing against them the vengeance of offended heaven, and shutting them out of the kingdom above. It would even be more consistent to question the *canonical authority* of the passage than to use it thus. But there is no need for such a resource. The lessons plainly taught are—

1. That, while wine and strong drink were not to be used in excess by any, and specially by those who, from their situation required, for others' interests as well as for their own, the constant possession of a clear head and a sound and discriminative judgment,—yet, they were not without their use:—

2. That their use especially consisted in their being cordials to the suffering and depressed in spirit, to be used in the manner and for the purposes which a kind and gracious Providence designed them to answer. The same Providence that furnished the corn furnished the wine; and, when the one was used for its own purpose, with equal propriety and sinlessness might the other.\* Those therefore who were "heavy of heart," from whatever cause, were warranted to use the means, in such a way as to revive them, and cheer them, and give them power to enjoy the good that remained to them. It is obvious that the use recommended is such as to enable them thus to *enjoy* whatever is fitted to yield enjoyment. But the drinking which the drunkard would fain find in this

\* See Psal. civ. 15.

passage, is drinking which, while it drowns suffering, drowns enjoyment too; inasmuch as by a reasonable creature nothing can be rightly enjoyed when he has deprived himself of his reason; and such is the effect of all drinking to excess.

3. The lesson is one of benevolence, sympathy, kindness. Instead of abusing the gifts of Providence in wanton, unbecoming, and criminal self-indulgence,—make a right use of them for the benefit of others. If bread is intended to “strengthen man’s heart,” and wine to “make it glad,” it becomes just as much a duty to administer the latter where it is required, as to supply the former where *it* is wanted,—to furnish the heavy-hearted with wine as the starving with bread. All depends on its being done on right occasions—in cases of really urgent need. This is the use, then, which Lemuel’s mother admonished him to make of his abundance. Instead of spending his substance in gluttony or in epicurean nicety and luxury—she would, on the same principle, have admonished him to “deal his bread to the hungry”—to supply the wants of the destitute and famishing. The principle is in both cases the same. Give meat where it is needed; give drink where it is needed. Give the loaf to the starving; give the wine and the cordial to the sick-at-heart and desponding.—But—

4. Let not any such sentiment be misunderstood and perverted. Let not such inference be drawn, as that the blessed Bible directs to wine and strong drink as the refuge from the cares and sorrows of life. Because a thing may contribute to an end in one way, it does not follow that it must contribute to it in another. Because wine may contribute by its naturally cheering influence, to raise the animal spirits, and, from the connexion between the body and the mind, may thus dispose the latter for enjoyment which it would not otherwise have been in a condition to relish, that therefore it is the source to which the Bible directs the wretched for their comfort—would be an inference as senseless as it would be false and impious. No, my friends. When resorted to for such a purpose, it is the most wretched of all resources. We tremble for the man,—for his health—for his prosperity—for his char-

acter—for his family—for his own and their temporal and spiritual interests—who has recourse to the bottle, as his refuge from himself and from the cares that press upon his spirit. O ye poor and afflicted ones, the Word of God directs you, when distressed by the present, and anxious for the future, to another, a higher, a purer, an innocent, and a sure spring of consolation. The religion of the Bible,—the gospel, with its “exceeding great and precious promises,” opens fountains of joy and gladness to your souls, amidst all the drought and desolation of your earthly lot. It sheds a blessed and cheering light upon the gloom of affliction, checks the feelings and the utterance of despondency, and teaches and enables the desponding and sinking spirit to say—“Yea, though the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.” He who professes to believe in God, as a reconciled God and Father in Christ Jesus, and in those promises which relate to both the life that now is and that which is to come, the promises of unchanging faithfulness and love,—who believes in the divine assurance that “all things do work together for good to them that love God;”—that He will never leave them nor forsake them;—that, “not having spared His own Son, He will also, with him, freely give them all things;”—he who believes these things, and yet betakes himself to other and baser sources of relief,—flies from his cares to the wine and the strong drink, and drinks himself into forgetfulness of them,—finding his Bible and the throne of grace either distasteful or incompetent for his relief,—must labour under some mighty delusion,—some unquelled and unsanctified principle of corruption. O! as you value all that is dear to you, beware of imagining that you have Bible authority for such a refuge. The Bible, wherever the subject is touched, condemns every approach to excess; and no circumstances will justify it. And it is a relief, moreover, as temporary as it is sinful; and it leaves behind it the superadded distress of a conscience ill at ease;

and this again goads on to the greater indulgence, till even the professing Christian, who for a time "did run well," sinks into the degraded and miserable sot!—And those who complain of a nervous and morbid temperament had better beware. By having recourse to this cure, they may get a momentary stimulus, but one which, by its reaction, may only, in the long-run, aggravate the very evil which it was meant to alleviate and remove, and bring them to ruin.\*

Verses 8, 9. "Open thy mouth for the dumb in the cause of all such as are appointed to destruction. Open thy mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy."—This stands directly opposed to whatever would unfit a magistrate for "judging righteous judgment." The "*dumb*" are either the literally dumb—who are thus naturally incapacitated for speaking in their own behalf,—or such as from extreme modesty and timidity, or any similar cause, are prevented from pleading for themselves. Such as these, together with "the poor and the needy" and "those appointed to destruction"—the friendless and unprotected—those who have no resources to enable them to maintain a plea with the man who oppresses and would defraud and injure them—those unjustly and cruelly devoted to ruin, by their superiors in rank and power,—he was to regard it as in a special manner his incumbent duty to take by the hand, to see that they get justice, and to save from meditated and attempted wrong.

I close with one reflection. If it is of importance for the poor and unfriended to have any one who will take their part, and come between them and wrong, how valuable to us poor helpless sinners the interference and advocacy of the gracious Redeemer,—the days-man and mediator between us and our justly offended God! From that God, it is true, we can never "*suffer wrongfully*:" He is "the righteous Lord," who "loveth righteousness:"—a "God of truth and without iniquity." But His law we have violated; and in His

\* For the discussion of the use of intoxicating drinks, see Lectures lvii, lviii, lix.

judicial capacity He *must* punish us. How delightful to know Him in the mercy as well as in the justice of His character, and to be assured that to that mercy, on the ground of His own atoning blood, our divine and all-merciful Intercessor makes appeal. He will plead the cause of all who in faith commit their cause to Him. “Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.” O to be able to say, “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day!”

## LECTURE XCVI.

PROV. XXXI. 10—31.

“Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies. The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. She will do him good, and not evil, all the days of her life. She seeketh wool and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands. She is like the merchants’ ships; she bringeth her food from afar. She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens. She considereth a field and buyeth it: with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard. She girdeth her loins with strength, and strengtheneth her arms. She perceiveth that her merchandise is good: her candle goeth not out by night. She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff. She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy. She is not afraid of the snow for her household: for all her household are clothed with scarlet. She maketh herself coverings of tapestry; her clothing is silk and purple. Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land. She maketh fine linen, and selleth it; and delivereth girdles unto the merchant. Strength and honour are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come. She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness. She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness. Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her. Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all. Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates.”

THIS is the remainder of “the words of King Lemuel”—of “the prophecy which his mother taught him.” We learn from it on what correct principles that mother estimated the happiness of her son:—how sound, how judicious, and how fully in accordance with the revealed mind of God, the coun-



sel which she thus gave him.—I say, the *counsel*: because, although the passage contains only a *description*, yet nothing can be more manifest,—especially when the verses are taken in connexion with the negative and prohibitory admonition in the third verse,—than that counsel is meant to be conveyed. And when we recollect that the passage forms part of an inspired communication, we must regard it not merely as the counsel of Lemuel's mother, but of Lemuel's God.

As introductory to the illustration of the verses, we may observe, that the counsel proceeds upon the assumption of the original state of things,—of the primary and divine constitution of the marriage relation, when “God made a male and a female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh:”—that is, upon the great general principle, which alone has the authority of Heaven, that “Every man have his own wife, and every woman her own husband.” We do not deny that the same legislative authority which fixed the principle may, in particular cases, grant the suspension of it. But has this ever been done? That good men have acted in violation of the original constitution, is true; but that they had, in any instance, the divine sanction in doing so, is another question. I more than doubt it. Every instance of the kind I believe to have been *sin*:—nor does there seem ground to make a single exception in affirming, that they who sinned suffered for it; that every departure of the kind brought with it a greater or less degree of unhappiness. In the passage before us, the “virtuous woman” is, beyond question, represented as the *one wife of one husband*.

The description, it may be remarked, is a regular poem. It is composed on a similar principle with that exemplified in the 119th Psalm. Each verse begins with a different letter, and according to the order of the letters in the alphabet. This, amongst other advantages, was fitted to assist the memory;—and the poem was one well worthy of being committed to the memory of every mother and every daughter in Judea.

Whether the picture was drawn from real life, or merely by the mind of the artist under divine illumination,—the Spirit of God guiding her hand in the sketch,—is a question which we need not be careful to settle. The latter is probably the truth. And the portraiture is a lovely one. It is arrayed, it is true, in the appropriate costume of the country and the age in which it was delineated; but in every country and in every age the features are such as must command admiration. The character, I mean, is sketched with a reference to the peculiar usages of the place and the period; but the great outlines of it, divested of those local and temporary peculiarities, are of permanent and universal excellence.

A “*virtuous woman*” (verse 10.) must not, in this connexion, be understood merely with respect to the single point of honour and chastity. The word here is very comprehensive. It is to be interpreted from the description. It means *such a woman*;—a woman rightly feeling the various and interesting obligations under which her situations and relations have placed her; and conscientiously and perseveringly discharging the duties arising out of them, under the predominant influence of “pure and undefiled religion”—the fear and the love of God.

What means the question—“Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies.”—1. *Rarity*. There are comparatively few who come up to the standard which the mother of Lemuel had conceived in her mind. Many may approach to it, in nearer and more remote degrees; but there are few—we might ask, perhaps, *are there any?*—who have not their peculiar defects and failures. Thus the happy husband of such a wife as is here described, is represented as saying—verse 29, “Many daughters have done virtuously; but thou excellest them all.”—2. That *it is not by purchase* that such a wife is to be obtained. “Her price is far above rubies.” Her principles and her character are such as place her *above* being purchased. Solomon and other Eastern princes might get their seraglios filled with beauty, by the temptations they could hold out to vanity and to worse passions by the bribes of wealth and splendour.

Solomon might thus have his hundreds of *princesses*. But well might it be said, Who can by *such* means find a virtuous woman? What virtuous woman would have her place there? *A thousand* was the very number of Solomon's seraglio:—and when he says, “One man among a thousand have I found, but a woman among all those have I not found;” who can wonder? The wonder would have been *if he had*. It is slander of the female character, to take an estimate of it from such a quarter. *Buy* a virtuous woman!—buy such a woman as is here depicted!—the very imagination of her consenting to be so bought—were it even to be, not the associate of hundreds more, but the wife of one—spoils the character,—robs it of its prime attraction.—

3. *Preciousness*. This unbought and unpurchasable excellence is, in the eyes of the man to whom it is spontaneously, and in conjugal faith and love, surrendered, of inestimable value:—and she becomes the happiness of his life. It is the first of earth's blessings; and it never comes alone; it brings a thousand with it. Truly and emphatically might it be said of the man who found *such* a wife—“He that findeth a wife findeth a good thing: and shall obtain favour of the Lord.”—

4. The question suggests the reflection, which, from its importance, can hardly be too often repeated—that the forming of the marriage union should be a matter of serious deliberation and inquiry; not a matter of hasty, capricious, thoughtless resolution,—the resolution of momentary fancy or sudden impulse. It should be an endeavour to find a suitable character,—a careful looking out and searching for such a one. And allow me to say—for it is a true saying—that if this were more attended to by those who *seek* wives, the character, in its various features of excellence, would be more sedulously cultivated by those who are destined *to be* wives. The character of the one sex will ever tell reciprocally on the other.—

5. Lastly, and above all, this connexion must never be a matter of barter, or of pecuniary calculation:—“Her price is far above rubies.” It is an infinite degradation of this first and highest and most hallowed of earthly unions, when, on either side, it is reduced to a balance of

sordid worldly interests. He who gets such a wife gets what is, in its own intrinsic worth, incomparably better than the greatest amount of wealth,—than the richest precious stones and jewels. It would be a rare act, (but, were it possible, it would be a far more rational one,) for a man to part with the largest fortune for the acquisition of a *good* wife, than to obtain the largest fortune by wedding a *bad* one.

It would unavoidably lead to a good deal of repetition,—while it would not, in the end, leave in the mind so distinct a conception and estimate of the character described, and the benefits arising from it in conjugal and domestic life, were we to illustrate the verses in the order in which they lie before us. I shall rather endeavour to classify the particulars under the two heads at which I have just hinted;—**THE CHARACTER:—and ITS HAPPY EFFECTS.**

1. We have, then, as the first feature of this lovely character, *invincible fidelity*:—Verse 11. “The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil.” This implies, *first*, the faithfulness of pure, virtuous, undivided attachment. Her husband has no ground for any restless, uneasy jealousy of wandering affections. He has perfect reliance on her plighted troth, and on her undivided love; assured, and happy in the assurance, that her heart is his, and his alone. In proportion as the spirit of jealousy, when it finds admission into a man’s bosom, is a spirit of inquietude and agony, the experience of this unshaken unsuspecting assurance of the heart’s entire appropriation must be precious and delightful. Then, *secondly*, the faithfulness in which “the heart of her husband trusteth,” relates to the entire management of her domestic affairs. He can entrust everything to her. He can put his purse into her hands, in the full confidence that not one farthing will be alienated by her to either selfish or foolish ends,—but all held sacred to the good of the family; that nothing will be unprofitably squandered, and nothing secretly kept back,—but all applied faithfully, and wisely, and well; so as to leave her husband, in regard to all domestic concerns,—all

the transactions that relate to the supply and regulation of the household—"without carefulness." That this second department of fidelity is specially meant, is clear from the latter part of the verse—"So that he shall have no need of spoil." While he trusts, he "*safely* trusts." He feels no temptation to have recourse to any unjust, oppressive, and unwarrantable means for recruiting his lavished resources,—for supplying his exhausted coffers,—*spoiling* others, in whatever way, to get means for himself:—a temptation which many a man has been made to feel by the extravagance of either a selfish, or an imprudent, rash, miscalculating wife,—a wife whose sanguine temper and fondness for personal and family display, destroy all providence, shutting her eyes both to the past and to the future. It may be right to notice here, the imperative duty of every husband, in order to his wife's being in a condition to "deal prudently," and to be faithful in her management,—to put her in possession at all times of a correct knowledge of the true extent of his means. If in this she is deceived by him, and made to fancy the resources at his disposal greater than they actually are, she may get the blame which is due not to her but to him. And when the means are narrow and scanty, it is a vast comfort to the poor man to have full confidence that his wife will *keep within them*—that she will not run accounts, and contract debts, and disgrace and ruin him. For the *principle* of the character must be cherished and displayed among the wives of all classes of society. The poor man needs the comfort of this confidence as well as the rich.

2. Next after her duty to her God, the first desire of her heart, and the constant and persevering endeavour of her life is, *to promote the comfort and well-being of her husband and family*:—Verse 12. "She will do him good, and not evil, all the days of her life."

No doubt this implies that she studies his character,—makes herself aware of his peculiar tempers and humours, his likings and his dislikings,—in order that she may, as far as possible from ability and from principle, accommodate herself to them; seeking in all things to please and gratify him.

But while I make this remark, let it not be abused by husbands, as if it held out any toleration to them to indulge humours that are capricious, wayward, and unreasonable. Even with such humours the truly good wife will do her utmost to bear,—and more than to bear. But because servants are enjoined to be subject not only to “good and gentle” but also to “*froward*” masters, this is no vindication of the masters’ frowardness. We must not allow husbands to lose sight of their own duty, while we are speaking of that of their wives. Yet the good wife will remember that to make a froward and capricious husband sensible that she is ever desiring and aiming to “do him good and not evil,” is the most dutiful way on her part, and the way most likely to succeed with him, of subduing his waywardness, and winning him to greater reasonableness and right temper. But that which the words before us specially imply is—that she devotes herself to the advancement of her husband’s honour and reputation—his health of body and of mind,—his substantial interests,—his temporal and spiritual benefit, and of course the benefit of his family:—that she does this with cheerful delight, from the prevalence of real affection,—her heart being in it all.

And this she does—“*all the days of her life.*” She does it *constantly*:—not by mere fits and starts; not after the manner of some women, who are the subjects of shifting tempers and capricious humours; who are wonderfully fond—passionate in their endearments, while the fit chances to be upon them, but as cross-grained and ill-natured as possible perhaps the very next hour.—And she does it *perseveringly*. Her engagement being *for life*, she keeps to it till the end. She does not “weary in well-doing,” but pursues the one object of her wedded state and her plighted conjugal love, to the very last. Her course of attentions, and active promotion of her husband’s well-being is not the result of the mere fervour of a first love, but of a firm, faithful, principled attachment, and, along with it, a paramount and imperative sense of duty. That duty is—“till death us do part.”

3. The next feature is *assiduous and cheerful industry*;—

diligence in every useful occupation opposed at once to laziness and to pride,—to sloth and to vanity; and accompanied with wise, considerate, prudent management. This embraces a number of verses, in which it is presented under various aspects:—Verses 13—19; 21, 22; and 27.

In the first of these verses, she is said to “work *willingly* with her hands;” that is, *cheerfully*, without sighing that she has it to do, and wishing she could but be exempted from either the *exertion* or the *degradation*. She does not consider it as either; but puts her *heart* where she knows her *hands* should be. I have said that this is in opposition to both laziness and pride, sloth and vanity. The description, remember, was addressed to a *prince*, and therefore has reference to such a wife as *he* should choose, for the inmate of his palace,—for the partner of his royal dignity. Yet the mother of Lemuel does not regard manual labour as beneath respectability and high station of the wife of a king. She says, Verse 19. “She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff.” It was customary among the Jews to bring up all their youth to some handicraft occupation. It was an excellent rule, both as respected the cherishing of right dispositions, and as respected a prudent anticipation of the future, in which so many and so great alternations of condition might await the rising generation. And we may suppose the inculcation of practical industry was not confined to the one sex alone, but extended, and that in all classes of the community, to both. But the lesson before us is a good one in all places and times. Those who are in superior stations in life ought never to be ashamed to put their hands actively to household affairs. If the mother of king Lemuel had any daughters, it will not be doubted that she would inculcate upon them the habits which she commends in a wife for her son. She would train them to be such wives as the one she here describes. The qualities she would have Lemuel seek in a daughter-in-law, she would desire to see in her own daughters. Wives in high life need not have their hands hanging listlessly down, or think it beneath them to apply themselves to any useful and becoming occupation. There are those at

times to be found who would toss their heads at the very idea of their being supposed even to know anything about the management of a household. To name a spindle and a distaff to *them*, would be an insult never to be forgiven! What would Lemuel's mother have said of such? She would have warned the young prince against them—as not fit wives for *him*! Women in such stations should even have an honest pride and pleasure in showing as much as they can of the fruits of their own industry—doing all in their power for the internal comfort and well-being of their households. It does not become any to regard industry as a vulgar virtue, and so to sit at their ease with their hands folded, as if it were the privilege and the honour of their *caste* in society to be idle. If they have not enough to keep them busy with the concerns of *their own* families, need they, on that account, be unemployed? May they not be DORCASES? How many families around them who would bless them for the product of their industry! Was it any discredit to Dorcas, was it not, on the contrary, her enviable honour, when “the widows” stood around her corpse “weeping, and showing the coats and garments she had made while she was with them?” She who is too proud to “lay her hands to the spindle and the distaff”—that is, to apply herself actively to such employment as her husband and family and the good of others may require,—has much yet to learn of the spirit of the religion of Jesus, and of the character of a “good wife.” We have still many examples, even in superior stations, of *active housewifery*,—of minds vigorous in common sense and sound principle, and far above the pitiful affectation of sentimental idleness. *Spinning-wheels*, however, were more in fashion in the days of our grandmothers, than they are now;—and I am not sure if the change has been for the better.

The industry, I have said, is associated with *considerate prudence and propriety*. She rightly *keeps her place and station*. While always busy, and usefully busy, she still holds her proper position as *mistress* and *superintendent* of her household: she sees that all are at their proper employments, and that these are all suitably and seasonably provided



for them; that they have their morning meal and their means of work in due season:—she is the general directress and provider. Such is the spirit of verse fifteenth, “She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens.” And it is the *spirit* of the passage we must seek to extract:—the minute illustration of particulars in detail would be tedious and unprofitable. Hence we notice further, that she studies to preserve a discreet and happy *medium*—maintaining an equal distance between mean penuriousness and wasteful profusion and extravagance. First of all, she *procures* abundance, and that *at the best markets*:—verse 14. “She is like the merchants’ ships; she bringeth her food from afar.” It would be no recommendation to get from a distance what could be got equally well at hand—as *good*, and as *cheap*. The meaning therefore is—(and it were not amiss for statesmen sometimes to learn the lesson as well as wives) that she does not satisfy herself with getting at hand what she can get *better* and *cheaper* from afar. She spares no pains to provide what is good—what is suitable and wholesome—for all her household: and, as her industry enables her to go to the best markets, she is never at a loss for the requisite supplies. This is one part of her prudence. Then, with regard to the *laying out* of what she still has to spare, there is equal discretion. She lets nothing go to waste; but makes the most of every thing. She “gathers up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.” And what does she with the surplus?—what does she with the produce of her industry? Does she spend it in what is trifling and useless—in what serves no purpose but the gratification of vanity? The answer is—verse 16. “She considereth a field, and buyeth it: with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard.” Here is something valuable—something of real permanent use to the family:—and even with regard to this, observe, there is *consideration* before purchase: the field and the price are carefully looked to, that she may not buy land that will yield no return; and that she may not give more for it than it is worth. And then, when she has made the purchase, she turns it to the best

account:—in the field, “with the fruit of her hands *she planteth a vineyard*,”—the wine of which may at once supply the family and bring a profit from sale.

4. A further feature is *liberal and kindly benevolence,—open-hearted, open-handed, practical charity*:—ver. 20. “She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy.” This implies, first, The spirit of *tenderness and compassion*:—a spirit lovely in all; and especially attractive in the female character. And the modes of expression used respecting the practical working of this compassion indicate two things—*readiness*, and *liberality*. Without doubt, charity, both in men and women, should be regulated in its exercise by judicious discretion; and in the previous parts of the character this has been well provided for. It is right and necessary that sound judgment should be united with sensibility. To give way to every impulse of the latter without the intervention of the former, would often do harm instead of good. This is all true. Judgment must preside over the practice of charity. And yet, in woman especially, the *sensibility* of charity is better than the *philosophy* of charity. I would rather see a woman give, under the impulse of feeling, with a full heart and a melting eye, even in a case which to judgment might be somewhat questionable,—than hear her, in such a case, discuss with acuteness and zeal the principles of political economy, and freeze up her heart in the coldness of clear but icy calculation. It implies, secondly, the spirit of *obedience to the divine will*. We have that will beautifully and briefly expressed in the words of an inspired Apostle—“Let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, *that he may have to give to him that needeth*.” The principle of *labour* is thus the spirit of *benevolence* as well as of *self-love*. The latter of course is first:—the supply of our own need and that of our families. But we are not to stop there. We are not to think that we have laboured enough when we have made out *that* object:—there is still an ulterior one. The wife here portrayed, while her husband and family have the prior claim, still looks, with the eye of benevolence, beyond

them, and stretches beyond them the hand of charity. And I may notice, further, That such a wife—thus faithful, thus active, thus prudent, thus kind,—is well entitled to full liberty in the exercise of her charity—in the delighted indulgence of her benevolent affections. She will, without doubt, in all cases of importance, seek to go along with him who is, or ought to be, the partner of all her feelings and all her wishes. But it would be harsh and cruel to stint and restrain such a disposition in such a bosom. Where feeling has so complete an ascendancy over judgment as to dethrone it altogether, and to produce a reckless, indiscriminating and really pernicious prodigality of almsgiving, greater restraint may be necessary. But this is no part of the character here depicted.

## LECTURE XCVII.



PROV. XXXI. 10—31.

(SECOND LECTURE.)

5. The next thing which marks the good wife is—*dress and establishment, in accordance with her station and condition in life*: verse 22. “She maketh herself coverings of tapestry; her clothing is silk and purple.”

The *station* of the wife described is evidently that of the higher rank of life. Lemuel’s mother, being the mother of a prince, must be supposed to delineate the character of the wife of a prince,—although the *elements* of the character are such as ought to be found in wives of every degree. The character is an admirable one:—and its crowning feature is *true piety*. All the other features are in keeping with one another and with this. The obvious inference is, that it is not inconsistent in “a virtuous woman,”—in “a woman that feareth the Lord,”—to wear “silk and purple,” or to have “coverings of tapestry” in her house.—Observe by the way, the latter is another of the fruits of her own industry. It is the work of her own hands:—“she *maketh herself* coverings of tapestry;” so that her very elegancies are associated with exemplary conduct, with the active occupation of her time.

It must be obvious that this is one of those subjects of a *general* description, which do not at all admit of anything like the precision of *fixed and definite rule*. The great matter is to be under the influence and the guidance *of right*

*principle*—of a truly Christian disposition accompanied with sound and sober-minded discretion. The following remarks chiefly relative to *dress*, are in the spirit and partly in the letter of them, applicable also to furniture and household establishment generally.

i. While, as I have said, it cannot be inconsistent with the other parts of the character described, for a woman to have “her clothing of silk and purple,” when such attire befits her rank and station, yet, observe, the *first attention is to comfort*: (v. 21.) “She is not afraid of the snow for her household: for all her household are clothed with scarlet.” The word rendered “scarlet” is on the margin “*double garments*.” The original word signifies *double*; but some consider it as referring to the *double dip* or *dye* of the scarlet or purple colour. The connexion, however, decidedly favours the marginal rendering. Now to this consideration of *comfort*, there is often manifested a very senseless disregard; a disregard such as would evidently have been a flaw in the character before us. There are women to be found, who dress both themselves and their children for *display*. Comfort or no comfort, they must, as the first point, be fine and in the fashion. Winter or the dogdays, it is all one to them. If fashion and finery require them to shiver, shiver they must. They will risk the health of their families, and cherish the most pernicious principles in their bosoms, rather than not have them at the very top of the most approved style. Now, this is folly and something worse. The woman before you, makes the difference which nature and common sense point out:—silks in summer, and woollen in winter; single in sunshine, and double in frost and snow: “she is not afraid of the snow for her household;” for when the snow comes, she has not new clothing to make for it, but suitable raiment in readiness:—“all her household then are clothed in double garments.”

ii. Dress and general style should be opposed to *extravagance*:—that is, they should be in accordance with the real extent of a man’s or woman’s *means*. And the extent of means must be calculated by a variety of considerations;

especially, there ought to be, in apportioning what is allotted to dress and furniture and accommodation, a due regard to the other claims of a family, such, for example, as those of *education*—for even these are sometimes sacrificed and stinted for the sake of what is external, what meets the eye and attracts the notice of the superficial and the silly;—also to the claims of the *poor* and of the *cause of God*,—which are many a time, even by professing Christians, placed in the background, and put in abeyance, when a fashionable article of dress or of furniture comes into competition with them,—although a less expensive one might serve the purpose equally well. This is not as it ought to be. I cannot believe that the wife described by Lemuel's mother would for the sake of "silk and purple" to herself for clothing, have foregone another attribute of her character, in its practical and delightful exercise—"the stretching out of her hands to the poor,—the reaching forth of her hands to the needy."

iii. These adornments of person and house should be opposed to *vanity*. There may be no small amount of this, where there is but little of extravagance. The dress may not be particularly dear; but there may be manifested, in the make and the adjustment of it, a great deal of minute and anxious care, and pains, and time. It may, though cheap, be gaudy and fantastic; or evidently and solicitously studied for the attraction of notice and admiration, and the setting-off of the person to advantage. What, on this subject, says the word of God to Christian women? "Whose adorning, let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price," 1 Pet. iii. 3, 4.\* Such passages do not mean that no gold, no silver, no jewels, should ever form any part of female attire,—and that the hair must never be plaited, or in any way whatever orna-

\* See also 1 Tim. ii. 9, 10.

mentally arranged:—for if you go thus literally to work, you cannot but see the conclusion;—that “the *putting on of apparel*” at all must, on the same principle, be dispensed with,—and “good works,” with “a meek and quiet spirit,” be substituted for clothing. This is utterly absurd. The meaning very plainly is—that in these things was not to consist “*their adorning*,”—that these were not to be the things about them that attracted notice, or excited admiration, or that were the topics of conversation among others when they were spoken about. *Christian temper* and *Christian character* were rather to be what they studied, and were anxious to acquire; that they might be noticed and spoken of for their likeness in spirit to Christ, and for their works of charity and labours of love, rather than for the beauty and the taste, and the costliness of their dress, of aught about them that was merely external.

iv. I need not say, that all must be opposed to the slightest approach to *indecenty*. Everything of the kind must be studiously shunned by “women professing godliness;” and their example and influence should be united to discountenance and to put it down.

v. None must be allowed to excuse themselves for *tawdriness and filth*, by pleading that they cannot afford to be *fine*. Let none thus excuse one extreme by pleading another. It is not the duty of those who *can* afford it to aim at being *fine*. But every one, in every station, can afford to be clean, and neat, and tidy:—and these are at a great remove from finery. It is surprising what a difference you may see in different females and their families, in these respects, on the very same means:—and to my mind, I confess, there is almost as much incongruity in the idea of a slovenly and nasty Christian, as in that of a vain, a proud, a lying, or a cheating Christian.

6. The next feature is—*prudent, pious, gentle and affectionate converse*:—verse 26. “She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness.” *Two* things are here mentioned. They both form most valuable features of character. The first—“opening the mouth *with wis-*

*dom,*” stands opposed to such things as these—the imprudent utterance of what ought not, in discretion, to be spoken:—the disclosure of confidential secrets, or what were such by obvious implication, if not by formal stipulation:—the silly, vain, frothy emptiness, which marks the conversation of too many. It includes also the expression of a sensible and well-informed mind; conversation that is cheerful, instructive, appropriate to season and to company,—and if *witty*, innocuously witty, never sarcastic or venomous:—also sound advice and counsel in cases that call for it: and a disposition to serious and religious converse—pleasure in speaking and hearing of divine things,—not for display of knowledge, far less for pharisaical and sanctimonious pretension,—but, in “simplicity and godly sincerity,” for the ends of mutual edification,—the pleasing and salutary reciprocations of Christian affection, and growth by such means, in grace and in meetness for heaven.

The other good quality—“having in *the tongue the law of kindness,*” implies that all she utters is in the *spirit* and in the *manner* of a gentle and benevolent heart,—ever manifesting a kindly disposition, and fear of unnecessarily offending. Her tongue, that “unruly member” in both man and woman, is under control; and the control is that of the spirit of amenity and good-nature,—the “meek and quiet spirit which is, in the sight of God, of great price.” And the expression—“the *law of kindness,*” represents the kindness of her speech, as the result of a principle of *duty*—of a sense of obligation. *Love* is the fulfilling of the law of God. It is its beginning, middle, and end; its universally pervading principle. She knows this; and she cherishes a corresponding spirit, and restrains every utterance that, either in the temper it indicates or the temper it may provoke, is out of harmony with this love. Temper, at an unguarded moment, may suggest and prompt, what a sense of duty will curb and keep back.—The expression further implies that kindness in her speech is the result of a *principle of uniform operation*. This is an acceptance in which the word *law* is repeatedly used in scripture—and that, both in a good and a bad sense. It is thus



that Paul speaks of the “*law* in his members” and “the *law* of his mind;”—the former, the principle of corruption, tending uniformly in one direction and towards one class of words and actions; and the other, the principle of grace, tending uniformly in the opposite direction, and to an opposite class of words and actions. “The law of kindness” is kindness operating with the uniformity and constancy of a law. The principle is, at all times, in all places, and in all companies, the same,—as a *law* does not shift and accommodate itself to persons and circumstances. There are tempers that have anything in them but the steadiness and uniformity of a law. There may occasionally be cases of gentleness and kindness, and everything as it ought to be, at home, in the family circle, when there is roughness, sulkiness, and ill-nature abroad. It is much to be feared, however, that the reverse is a more frequently exemplified case; all smooth and smiling, soft and sweet, courteous and kind in other companies, while the rudeness, and the frown, and the bitterness, and the peevishness, and the crossness and the discontent, and the complaining and the scolding, are reserved for home;—“words smoother than oil” for strangers—“drawn swords” for husband and family. It is to the domestic circle—the home-scene, that the description, in the first instance, refers;—but she whose tongue “the law of kindness” regulates *there*, will keep it under the same authoritative regulation every where else.—It may mean also, that, while she rules her own tongue by the “law of kindness,”—this very law is the most powerful and efficient means of duly managing her household. If her husband chances to be somewhat hasty in temper and cross in his ways, she studies his temper, soothes and brings him round, and manages him by “the law of kindness.” By the same law she keeps her children in affectionate and cheerful subjection;—and by the same law she attaches her domestics, and procures the prompt and active service of grateful affection,—so that “whatsoever they do they do it heartily.” There is vast power in this “law of kindness,” and the woman here described, whether as a wife, a mother or a mistress, knows how

to put and keep it in exercise. Her household, and the entire circle in which she moves, feel and own its salutary and happy control. Generally speaking, it will be found, that even where authority is rightful, and the title to issue orders and require obedience unquestioned,—the tone and manner of kindness will go further towards procuring prompt, cheerful and efficient service than those of haughty and peremptory command. I speak in general. There are of course *different tempers* which require different treatment; and firmness may often be as necessary as kindness. The two are not incompatible.

7. I now come to the *last* feature in the character—namely, *genuine piety*,—*true godliness*—*as the foundation of all the rest*:—verse 30. “Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised.”

Though this stands *last*, it is very far from being *least*. Nay, mark well its position. It does not come in along with the rest, as forming *one of them* merely. It is a designation which *includes in it all the rest*. It is the sum of the whole. The *woman described* is “the woman that feareth the Lord;” and “the woman that feareth the Lord” is the woman described. Her fearing the Lord is the productive germ and pervading principle of the whole character:—so that, when the rest of it has been drawn, and it is asked—Where is such a character to be found?—the answer is—It is the character of the “woman that feareth the Lord,”—of *every* woman who is really under the influence of true religion. And this naturally suggests *two observations*, which may be of use to different *classes* of my hearers:—i. There may be *external conformity* to a number of the features of the character here described,—such as conjugal fidelity, and every attention to a husband’s and family’s comfort and well-being,—exemplary industry,—modest and becoming apparel, and discreet and prudent management,—while yet there may be *no piety*—no true religion. I should wish to impress the minds of such persons with the conviction, that, although the presence of such features of character and courses of conduct

are vastly better for the temporal comfort and happiness of a family than their absence, yet, in the sight of God, and in His estimate of character, they are miserably defective and even worthless *without this*. In *woman* as in *man*, *godliness* is what He first demands. Where the heart is not right with God,—all is wrong. There *are* domestic scenes to be witnessed, presenting much that is amiable, and much that seems happy,—much of mutual affection, mutual cheerfulness, and mutual desire and promptitude to serve one another, to anticipate one another's wishes, and to promote one another's welfare,—where *religion* has no place; where there is no domestic altar erected to God; where God's fear does not preside; where there is nothing beyond the dictate of natural affection. There are wives who, in all respects but this, set a becoming example, and seem almost all that you could wish them to be; and whose happy influence in the domestic circle is felt by every inmate and manifest to every eye. O how deeply one cannot but regret, in such cases, the absence of the "one thing needful!"—the absence of God! HE is not there. There is not the semblance of family religion. God's goodness is unacknowledged. God's blessing is unsought. God's love is unfelt. God's authority is unrecognized. There is neither the secret devotion of the closet, nor the social devotion of the domestic church. It is a scene of seeming enjoyment; and yet it is a scene of *atheism*—of *practical atheism*. It is one of the many manifestations of "the goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering of God," in which He withdraws not the fruits of his kindness, even although his hand is neither seen nor owned in their bestowment. And still further, the amiable exercise of the domestic affections, and discharge of the domestic duties, may be trusted in as the righteousness and the recommendation of the wife and the mother,—while the idea of self-renunciation and reliance on grace alone through the blood of atonement, is indignantly rejected!—We cannot fail, I repeat, deeply to lament the miserable defectiveness of all this, and the dishonour done by it to an excluded God. We sigh over the want. We

say, *O were God but there!*—were the scene of natural amiableness and domestic peace and cheerfulness only hallowed by the presiding and pervading influence of the spirit of piety! Men of the world think this would *spoil* the scene:—Christians think it would *perfect* it. What a strange, false, unworthy conception of true religion must that be, which fancies it the bane of social happiness,—which imagines the entrance of God spoiling enjoyment! It only shows what erroneous conceptions of enjoyment and happiness are prevalent in the world. What can that happiness be, which God would spoil! to which PIETY would put an end! Is either personal or domestic happiness worthy of the name, of which this is true?

Let all professors of religion, on the other hand, bear in mind, that there is no genuine piety that is not *practical*,—personally and socially practical. True religion must tell upon the character,—and that in all its departments:—and nowhere more than in the domestic circle. It is here that men and women appear in what may be called *the undress of life*. It is of the *femalè* character that I now speak. Now, as a woman may array herself in the garb of her Sunday finery when she goes abroad, and be an untidy slattern at home; so may the appearances of religion, both by men and women, be assumed in public and before the eyes of others, whilst at the domestic fireside all its amiable and lovely influence is laid by. I have no notion of this. Let me see men and women in the bosom of their families. What are they there? It is not what they are at church;—or what they are in the drawing-room or the convivial party;—or even what they are in the fellowship meeting where prayer is wont to be made:—but what are they *at home*? Much may go on there, of which the world knows nothing. Let me see the piety—the practical working piety—that displays itself in the mutual interchange of the kindly affections *there*,—and in the fond and faithful fulfilment of all the relative obligations of duty and of love. I have no idea of a godly woman that is not a good wife, a good mother, a good mistress. She cannot be pious as a *woman*, while she is careless

as a wife and a mother, and unkind and unjust as a mistress. There is such a character as a *spiritual gossip*;—a gad-about after sermons and religious meetings,—a mighty talker, or a whining complainer of all that will not spend their time with her as cold formalists and “wells without water;” while *home* is neglected, and husband and family left to feel the want. It is a very sad thing, when such anomalies in character present themselves to the world:—when women who profess to be fearers of God are surpassed in domestic amiableness and dutifulness by those who make no pretensions to religion. These things ought not so to be. It is one of the many ways in which professors “*lie against the truth.*” The truth disowns such characters. “Every one who is *of the truth,*” Christ says, “*heareth my voice.*” And where does the voice of Christ tell any woman that she may neglect her husband, provided she waits upon God?—that she may neglect her family, if she but attends the prayer-meeting?—that she may scold and maltreat her servants at her pleasure, if she reads her Bible, and minds her private devotions? What notions of piety must she have—how utterly perverse and dishonouring to God and to his word, who can act as if such were the case! True piety is ever a practical principle. It consists not in mere notions; nor does it consist in mere religious exercises. It is a prodigious mistake thus to regard the region for the exercise of piety as lying solely in the acts of worship—of immediate communion with God. It is a principle that diffuses its influence over the entire deportment of life,—that regulates all its movements,—that gives its peculiar character to all its words and all its actions. “The woman that feareth the Lord” will show her fear of the Lord by her active diligence in all her conjugal, maternal, and other domestic duties. She will discharge all these, in the spirit of affection and with constant and persevering assiduity,—because they are the injunctions of the God whom she fears:—and she will infuse into them *all* the spirit of her religion,—so doing them, as that “the fear of the Lord” may not be hidden, but may be visible as the spring from which the sweet waters flow.

## LECTURE XC VIII.

—◆—  
PROV. XXXI. 10—31.

(THIRD LECTURE.)

HAVING illustrated the CHARACTER of the good wife, we must now survey its HAPPY EFFECTS. There is—

1. The blessing of *entire mutual confidence*. We found this on verse *eleventh*. It is true, that it is only the confidence of the husband in the wife that is mentioned:—“The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her.” But it is quite evident that the good character of the husband is to be considered as assumed. He is one who is supposed to abstain from the licentious vices warned against in the previous part of the chapter; one who is capable of appreciating and duly admiring and valuing such a wife as the passage describes; one who is at the head of a happy family who in their estimate of excellence and in their love of it in one another have entire sympathy of soul. This appears from verses 28, 29. “Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her. Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all.” Thus they are all *one*,—one in character and one in social feeling—husband, wife, and children.

And what a blessing, in conjugal life, is mutual confidence—*confidence* entire and unshaken,—of the husband in the wife, and of the wife in the husband! It is a blessing precious in proportion as the relation between two parties is *close*

and *permanent*. How inexpressibly precious, then, in this relation—the closest and most permanent of all that belong to time! The relation was intended by that God whose name is Love, for mutual happiness; and, when formed and maintained on right principles, it most effectually answers the gracious end. And of all principles none is more conducive to the result than the reciprocal exercise of unsuspecting confidence. Where this exists; and where there is the interchange of fervent and faithful love; where there are hearts beating in unison,—each reposing on the other, and finding a ready and unequivocal response to every act and word and look of affection, and undisturbed by any apprehension of indiscreet or faithless disclosure of what the one intrusts to the other; and where, along with this, there is the union of spiritual feeling, and desire, and prayer, and practice,—the bonds of piety being superinduced upon, or intertwined with the ties of nature,—and all the intercourse hallowed by the fear, and sweetened by the love, and enriched with the jointly and daily supplicated blessing of a covenant God;—then is realized the purest and highest earthly enjoyment—the perfection of domestic happiness.

2. There is enjoyed *family comfort*;—in *food*, in *clothing*, in *regularity and order*,—every thing in *place*, and *time*, and *measure*:—Verses 15, 21. “She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens. She is not afraid of the snow for her household: for all her household are clothed with scarlet.” Need I say that *this* is a blessing? All feel it to be so;—the poorer as well as the richer. All like to have “their portion of meat in due season,” and not a stinted but an adequate and suitable supply; and all like clothing proportioned to the cold. But let me remind husband and wife, that to this *both parties* must contribute. We have, in the passage, an industrious and economical wife. But what can any wife, with her utmost industry and economy, do, if her husband is an idler or a spendthrift—making nothing for the family, or squandering, in folly or in profligacy, what he makes?—and on the other hand, what avails a husband’s utmost industry,

if on the wife's part there is the absence of management and economy? It is a very sad thing when the influences of husband and wife are in opposite directions,—the one undoing and counter-working all the salutary efforts of the other:—when the wife misapplies what the husband has laboured to obtain; or when the “virtuous woman” does all that *can* be done for domestic order and comfort and enjoyment, and her attempts are frustrated and rendered abortive by the folly, the extravagance, the selfishness, or the dissipation of her husband.

3. The acquisition and maintenance of *personal health and vigour*:—Verse 17. “She girdeth her loins with strength, and strengtheneth her arms.” This, indeed, may signify no more than that she puts forth all her energy:—that, as it is expressed verse 13th, “She worketh willingly with her hands.” Yet it may be considered as implying, that the very exercise contributes to her vigour. There are few things more enervating than a life of *sloth*. The sluggard, whether man or woman, soon becomes *unfit* for exertion. The frame gets relaxed, enfeebled, nerveless. It is not among those who sleep much and work little, that energy either of body or mind is generally to be found. It is among *early risers* and *hard workers*. I mean not, of course, workers *beyond strength*; for *that* never can contribute to health and vigour, but workers that do not grudge and spare their strength—*willing* workers.

I am well aware, that there are qualifications to be made here, both as to *sleep* and as to *work*. God has not given to all the same bodily constitution. And *he* would be a most unnatural husband—heartless and cruel, who would—I will not say *require*, but even *expect* or *allow*, a wife of delicate and feeble frame to apply herself to any description of labour beyond what she can bear. There are cases, in which the *will* outruns the *ability*, and in which disease and death have been the consequence of over-exertion. Still experience bears out the position, that activity contributes to health and strength; and especially *morning activity*. The wife before us, we have seen, is an early riser. But as to



*sleep*, just as in regard to work,—it must be regulated by circumstances. Yet not a little depends on *habit*. *Sleep* is one of the most wonderful, and wise, and merciful provisions of the God of nature:—but it is one in which we must beware of *over-indulgence*. It is not intended as a mere luxury. It is designed to recruit our weary frames for fresh service—to promote health and vigour, and renew our ability for daily work. Let dutiful wives, then, see that they never make a plea of natural inability, when the ability is in reality *moral*,—when it is want of *will* more than want of power,—ever complaining of weakness, when the true object is the luxury of folding the hands together, and sitting at ease. And let husbands beware of oppression,—of overstimulating the willing spirit, and bringing the wives whom they should cherish in love to an untimely grave by excess of application.

4. We have the *increased respectability of her husband from his connexion with her*:—Verse 23. “Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land.” In this there is something quite natural. The connexion is close—the closest on earth. Every thing, in consequence, that affects materially the character and reputation of the one side of the house, has an unavoidable, though indirect, bearing on that of the other. The wife may be honoured and respected for her husband’s sake, as well as the husband for the wife’s; and, on the contrary, whatever lets down the dignity and respectability of the one, operates—unjustly it may sometimes be, but inevitably—upon that of the other. In the case before us,—it is quite manifest, the husband is a man who has respect and honour *on his own account*. His sitting among the elders of the land,—his holding a high judicial function, “being known *in the gates*,” could never be meant as the result solely of his connexion with *her*. We should rather, I apprehend, take the twofold view of the case:—*First*, that in consequence of her rare combination of excellencies, she becomes the wife of a correspondingly eminent and deserving husband;—a husband worthy of such a wife, and one whom prince and people de-

light to honour:—And then, *secondly*, that *her* excellencies, thus united with his, tend to the enhancement of his respectability and admiration. He is known—not only as an elder and a judge,—but as *her husband*. There is an addition to the respect with which he is regarded, *on her account*—as the husband of such a wife. Thus the influence is *reciprocal*. People say, Ah! what a couple! how admirably adapted for each other! the husband is worthy of the wife, and the wife of the husband.—But it is of the *wife's* influence we are now speaking. Not only does a portion of the respect felt for *her* attach to him; but she contributes essentially to the respectability of his very appearance,—to the happy cheerfulness of his countenance and manners, and not a little, it may be, to the sober soundness of his judgment, and the judiciousness and prudence of his counsels.

Let wives bear in mind how much they have, in this respect, in their power. They necessarily appear before the world as having been the *choice* of their husbands. It inevitably follows, from this consideration alone, were there no other, that the characters of their husbands should, to a certain extent, be tested by theirs. If they are silly, senseless, and vain,—if they are idle untidy slatterns,—if they are scolds, or tattlers, or gossips, or given to wine,—there arises from their character a sure deduction from the respect which their husbands are themselves entitled to, and, but for them, would receive,—and a corresponding deduction from their influence and their usefulness. Yes, and the effect is not confined to the husband; it extends to the family. The very house ceases to be resorted to by those whose company would add both to its enjoyment and its honour,—who are scared away by the unamiableness and disreputableness of her who, conducting herself as she ought, should be the fond pride of her husband and her children.

5. We have as a further happy effect—*pleasant reflections on the past*:—Verse 25. “Strength and honour are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come.” It is the latter part of the verse especially on which I found this particular. The

terms of it may simply mean, that while the idle, the extravagant, the vain, the worthless may for the time attract personal admiration, and draw about them parasitical and pretended friends, who find it their present interest to enjoy the sunshine of their favour, or who like to while away their time in frivolity and indolence,—yet are they laying up for the period of age, desertion and contempt. They have neglected those accomplishments which alone are lasting, and given themselves to what, at a later season, when the gay days of youth have gone by, can yield them no springs of inward satisfaction and joy in their own bosoms,—and can attract towards them, in the time of their decline, nothing of the respect or veneration of others. A youth of folly is the precursor to an age of fretfulness and sorrow. On the contrary, the woman of the solid, substantial, permanent excellencies here described, “*shall rejoice in time to come.*” Her sources of enjoyment are such as will stand. They will serve for age as well as for youth. The “light which is sown for the upright,” is not the light of a passing meteor, that flashes and fades; it is light that “shineth more and more unto the perfect day.” Or if, so far as this world is concerned, it must sink and set,—its sinking will be tranquil and its setting joyous. The “virtuous woman” shall “rejoice” even to the last. Her “yesterdays will look backward with a smile.” The course she has in retrospect, contains in it the proofs of the reality of her religion. It has been consistent practical godliness.

There is one kind of delight in reflections on the past to such a character,—which is exquisite in proportion as the opposite is agonizing. The *wife* may be a *widow*. And I can imagine few things more pregnant with distress, than, when a husband is no more, to have busy memory ever bringing back to the heart recollections of unkindnesses and neglects; of words and looks and acts of passion; of duties which should have been done, and comforts which should have been provided, but which can now be done and provided no more; of words and acts and looks that cannot be recalled; and of neglects and unkindnesses that cannot be remedied, that can-

not so much as be confessed, and forgiveness obtained. Even a kiss of proffered reconciliation refused will, in the recollection, have in it "the gall of bitterness."—How pleasant, on the contrary, to reflect on a course of conjugal endearment that leaves no such remembrances behind it;—no stings and venomous barbs for the spirit of widowhood;—on which "she who is a widow indeed and desolate," can look back, only with grief that what, through the divine blessing, was so very sweet, has come to a close!—And let not husbands forget, that the very same principle applies, in all its force, on both sides of the relation. On the one side and on the other, it ought to operate as a motive to self-vigilance,—to a jealous guardianship of the passions,—to a careful abstinence from every unkind word or look or action, to the affectionate anticipation of every wish, and avoidance of whatever might leave a painful feeling or a mistaken impression;—to the mutual cultivation inwardly of the love that should bind conjugal hearts together,—and of the outward manifestation of that love, as it flows, in word and act, sweetly and spontaneously from the heart, in all the daily intercourse of life.—Let both parties so dwell together in this daily intercourse, as that, whichever is taken away first, Memory may be to the survivor a whisperer of consolation, and not of woe—that, together or apart, both may "rejoice in time to come."

6. The next thing in order is—the *delight afforded by the approval, the smiles, the commendation, the blessings, of those she most loves and values*:—verses 28, 29. "Her children arise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her. Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all." Ye wives—ye mothers!—what a lovely, what an enviable scene is this! How earnestly should each one of you strive to realize it in your own happy experience! Your children—affectionate, grateful, pious,—united in love to one another, and to you:—owning and commending with tears of sensibility and delight, their loved mother as the guardian, all kind and fond and faithful, of their infant years—blessing her, speaking well of her, praying for her, praising

her; growing up into life a credit to her early care, and requiting that care in every kind of practical attention to the well-being of her declining, perhaps her widowed years!—And then your husbands, while they live—during your life or after your death—standing up on your behalf, with a glowing heart and a glistening eye, and pronouncing your eulogy—“Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all!”—the language of affectionate admiration—captivated by the excellencies, and forgetting the defects,—the one so outweighing and outnumbering the other, as to throw them out of the mind’s sight altogether; and a commendation specially precious, as coming from the very quarter where the opportunity was the closest and most incessant of deserving and estimating both.—Such is the picture here brought before us. It is one on which the eye dwells with unsated and growing delight;—an affectionate and pious pair, one in the bond of nature, and one in that of grace,—hand in hand, and heart in heart,—surrounded by a group of happy children;—husband and wife, father and mother, parents and children, brothers and sisters,—all loving and loved,—all blessing and blessed,—every countenance beaming with mutual complacency,—every eye gleaming with cheerfulness and melting in love. And the chief contributor to this scene of affection, piety, and joy, is the “virtuous woman.” It is the influence of the character described that in such a scene is most prominently apparent. Let every christian wife emulate the character, that she may possess and communicate the joy.

7. The last here alluded to is of the happy results—*solid, substantial, lasting happiness and honour*—contrasted with what is vain, deceitful, and transient:—verses 30, 31. “Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hand; and let her own works praise her in the gates.”

The “*favour*” here spoken of seems, from the connexion, to be the favour which is won by mere beauty or personal appearance; and the “*beauty*” of course is that by which the

favour is attracted. The one is "*deceitful*," the other is "*vain*:"—that is, on the one side, the woman who trusts in the steadfastness of the favour that has been obtained by no better qualities than the symmetry of her features, the delicacy of her complexion, or the elegance of her person, will find herself disappointed—that the love on which she relied was *eye-love* only, not *heart-love*. The love that *wears well* must be obtained by qualities of a higher order.

On the other hand, "*beauty is vain*." Of course the beauty here spoken of is not the beauty that consists in the expression in the countenance of mental loveliness,—of the beauties of the mind and heart. It is the beauty only of feature and of form. The man who is attracted by it, and who unites himself for life with a woman in whom he has nothing else, will ultimately discover its vanity. It is itself but a fading flower. It cannot always retain its bloom:—and circumstances may produce a fading more rapid than nature and time, in ordinary course, must do. And unless there be something more deeply-seated than "the blooming tincture of the skin," that has drawn his love, all will quickly become insipid enough; and he will sigh over the vanity of his bewitched fancy and his foolish anticipations. When he comes to feel that in a wife and a mother there are other qualities indispensably necessary, both for conjugal companionship and for the training of a family, than such as are merely external, he will despise himself as a fool for his pains, for having allowed his eye thus to mislead his better judgment. He has his reward.

And while beauty may draw general attention, and obtain many a passing tribute of admiration, what is such admiration worth? How poor the praise that goes no further than the features and the complexion!—"She is certainly beautiful; every feature turned with exquisite symmetry, and all in harmonious proportion:—but (with a shrug) there's wonderfully little in her; she has neither heart nor mind."

One quality there is which, in the eye of Lemuel's mother, stood prominently forward, as first in the attributes of character entitling to the commendation which is here bestowed

—namely *true religion*—“the fear of God:”—“THE WOMAN THAT FEARETH THE LORD, she shall be praised.”—This is a quality neither “deceitful” nor “vain.” It is the germ of all the excellencies here enumerated;—the indwelling, living principle of them all. “*She shall be praised*”—praised by all that know her, and by all that hear of her:—yes, and by JEHOVAH himself. This is *God’s word*; and here is His recorded eulogy. It is His commendation of every one who bears the character. And when “the judgment shall be set, and the books shall be opened,” the owner of this character will be praised before the assembled world, by the God whom she feared, and loved, and served.—It is the duty of all to praise her,—and in thus commending, to “*give her of the fruit of her hands.*” It is no more than her just due,—no more than what she has wrought out and earned for herself. If tongues were silent, her works would speak for her. They “praise her in the gates”—praise her publicly, to the view and the admiration of all. Let her have the praise; and let the praise be coveted and emulated by women of every degree. Such women are, to a great extent, the formers of the character of a community. They frame the character of the nursery; and the character of the nursery, rising into manhood, becomes the character of the future generation. Besides:—it has become a trite and common-place remark, to what an extent the character of one sex affects that of the other; and how powerful, especially, is the influence of woman upon man. According to the place which woman holds in social life, may the character of the community, for meanness or for dignity, for hard-heartedness or sensibility, for coarseness or refinement, for sensuality or for intellectual and moral elevation, for the lightness of irreligion or the seriousness of piety, be estimated. Women in such a country as ours are little aware, in general, of the amount of their obligations to Christianity for the position in society which they occupy. O! would they but pay back to Christianity what they owe to it, by embracing its truths, imbibing its spirit, exemplifying its influence, and thus leavening domestic and social

life with its holy and happy effects! Much have they in their power; for though their immediate influence is in the domestic circle—their proper and legitimate sphere,—yet thence it spreads upwards, around, and onwards,—and the whole mass of society becomes impregnated by the influence of the wives and mothers of the land. And thus, in the most enlarged acceptation of the words, “their own works praise them in the gates.”

Let the children of godly and exemplary mothers think of the obligations under which they lie to providence for the privilege,—and beware of the wrong they must do to God and to society, if they fail to catch and transfuse the holy influence. Many have been the men—eminent in devotedness to God and in usefulness to the generations in which they have lived, who have imputed the germ of all their excellence and of all their beneficial working, to a mother's instructions and example. O! let race unto race praise the Lord, and one generation tell of his wonderful works to another, while sun and moon endure!













